

Self-Published Books Showcase

These books are recommended by *BlueInk Review*, a fee-based review service. Every month, *BlueInk* will compile a list of their favorite self-published titles 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

The Challenge of Choice . . . How to Make a "Good" Decision When it REALLY Matters!

By Richard Fast.

2023. 215p. 29 Days Inc., paper, \$24 (9780987919366). 150.

Humans are bad at making good decisions, notes Fast. In this cohesive guide, he explains why and offers strategies for self-improvement. Fast, a certified trainer and wellness and weight-loss coach, cites numerous cognitive studies showing how humans often make decisions based on visual misperceptions, personal biases, and other "hidden traps." The human brain is hardwired for making quick and intuitive decisions, but in the modern world, Fast posits, this can result in sloppy critical thinking and bad judgment. He gives examples of people wrongly guided by "gut" feelings and emotions and of others who routinely ignore evidence that contradicts their beliefs. Fast urges readers to "be wary of what you 'know' to be true." This is a well-written, sharply focused book that will spur readers to question their own decision-making processes. For people in the business world and beyond, this compelling book could be a game changer.

★ Extreme Vetting.

By Roxana Arama.

2023. 288p. Ooligan, paper, \$18 (9781947845381).

In this timely thriller, immigration attorney Laura Holban is herself an immigrant from Romania. A divorced mother to an American-born daughter, she knows firsthand the difficulties of re-establishing life in a new country. Overburdened with cases and the government's ever-changing immigration rules, her job has become increasingly difficult—and troubling—as gung ho anti-immigration lawyers and overtaxed judges send her clients back to dangerous situations in their home countries. But danger

gains new meaning when Laura takes Emilio Ramirez's case. The government's haste to deport Emilio isn't what it seems, and as Laura, with Emilio's son, David, tries to untangle the



web of lies and deceit, both families face life-threatening situations. The suspense is palpable here, and the characters layered. Laura is an intriguing heroine, humanized by her relationships with her Romanian mother and rebellious teenage daughter. Arama doesn't throw in frightening twists just for shock value. Instead, the shocking developments make an important point: painting all immigrants with a broad brush does a disservice to everyone. The novel will leave an indelible impression.

A Fair Knight Slain: Murder at the Renaissance Fair.

By Linda LeBlanc.

2023. 268p. Ama Dablam, paper, \$11.99 (9780978535339).

In this lively mystery set in a Renaissance fair, Gunnar the Undefeated, a knight who performs daily, is found dead, sliced up with the kind of dagger sold at the fair's gift shops. Sara Lansing, the police detective assigned to the case, partners with Ryker Harris, a New York detective who is also tracking a big-city drug lord running for mayor of the Florida town hosting the fair. Running against the drug lord is the local police chief, whose campaign hinges on solving this high-profile murder. Not surprisingly, the chief pressures Sara and Ryker to solve the case quickly. LeBlanc, who once worked at a Renaissance fair, clearly knows the territory. Her descriptions of the fairgrounds are spot on and often amusing: at a stage show, an actor announces, "Welcome to the Renaissance, where passions are high and penicillin's unavailable." Character development is weak initially; Ryker's

dialogue, especially, seems wooden. But the "rennies" and the story's many relationships largely compensate for this. Ultimately, readers will find an entertaining mystery with medieval-style mayhem.

★ Faster Than Light: How Your Shadow Can Do It but You Can't.

By Robert J. Nemiroff.

2023. 404p. Betelgeuse, \$29.98 (9781662933844). 530.

Imagine embarking on a journey to comprehend the physics of the entire universe with an expert who makes these concepts both digestible and entertaining. Nemiroff is such a guide in this book, which begins by describing the speed of light before touching on subjects as esoteric as time travel, among others. The author encourages readers to attack the book either by reading straight through or jumping around (what he calls the "butterfly method").

He uses accessible anecdotes to illustrate challenging concepts and sometimes provides simplistic drawings to prove a point. He also offers multiple-choice questions with three plausible answers and a fourth that's clearly in jest, allowing readers to appreciate his wit. Nemiroff, whose bona fides include work in astrophysics at NASA, bases his presentation on solid physics concepts. While the book isn't geared toward experts in quantum mechanics or string theory, it's not a watered-down "For Dummies" offering either. In fact, it provides a valuable resource for anyone who already grasps the basic concepts of higher mathematics and science and seeks a broader understanding of physics.

Just Arrived: A Different World.

By Bona Udeze.

2022. 347p. Bona Udeze, paper, \$12.99 (9781956741544).

This story illustrates the immigrant expe-

rience through the eyes of young Nigerian Emeka, who has dreamt about travelling to America for most of his youth. When the day comes, he embarks with a sense of excitement and purpose but immediately encounters the rigors of travel: negotiating the airport boarding process, then finding himself shuffled between immigration officials upon debarkation in Chicago. When his cousin picks him up, the car ride turns ominous when the young men are profiled, since they resemble Black men who committed a recent crime. Life in Chicago brings other eye-opening experiences, including the high cost of living. Emeka is an appealing protagonist that readers will easily root for. The author also weaves in social commentary, illustrating the dangers of both America and Nigeria. At times, Udeze is overly detailed, as in his unnecessarily long description of Emeka's trek through O'Hare airport. Nonetheless, those willing to overlook his occasional verbosity will find this a commendable read.

The Prophet's Pulpit: Commentaries on the State of Islam, v.1.

By Khaled Abou El Fadl. Ed. by Josef Linnhoff.

2022. 288p. Usuli, paper, \$19.99 (9781957063027). 297.

For Muslims, a khutbah usually refers to a Friday sermon before the noon prayer. Here, Linnhoff offers nearly two dozen such writings by noted Islamic academic and jurist Khaled Abou El Fadl. Linnhoff details his own conversion and the impact the professor's candid lessons about Islam had on his spiritual journey, which led him to translate and share El Fadl's writings. El Fadl carefully illuminates the revelations he says were detailed originally in the Quran. He isn't shy about challenging Old World stereotypes or calling out as hypocritical actions by Islamic heads of state who decry breaking of haram (the law), yet ignore it when it's convenient to build up coffers. He also namechecks recent Islamophobic Western leaders who stoke fears to garner favor in their own countries. Linnhoff translates Arabic terms woven within the essays and includes a glossary and texts for further reading. His intriguing, thought-provoking offering can be appreciated by those unfamiliar with Islam, Muslims who want to delve deeper into their belief systems, and even those advanced in their spiritual journeys, who will find value in connecting with others less far along.

Those We Leave Behind: The Cruellest Crop.

By John Scott Winters.

2022. 307p. John Scott Winters, paper, \$8.04 (9798364702326).

Winters' well-paced, cleverly plotted novel set in early 1930s Tennessee opens with farmer Harley Felts digging a grave, weighed down by memories. The grave is for his wife, Ellie, mother of their four sons, who died birthing their first daughter. Her funeral in-

troduces the boys and community members, who unite in offering to help Harley cope. At first, Harley's days are difficult as he tends to the farm and his children, including the new baby. But then Sara, a young woman sent from Baltimore to be with relatives, moves onto the Felts' farm and soon becomes an essential family member, cooking, caring for the youngest children, and even helping on the farm. As the story moves from struggle and danger to togetherness and, finally, love, Winters maintains tight control of the sweeping narrative by reinforcing the roles of central characters. Particularly impressive are the author's fully developed supporting characters. This finely crafted story offers an authentic portrait of a time and place and a realistic look at how members of one family struggle to integrate a troubled past into a hopeful future.



The Yawning Gap.

By C. V. Vobh.

2023. 448p. Thuban, paper, \$19.99 (9781961425019).

For generations, orks raiding the village of Beldria were felled by its legendary swordsmen. But that was centuries ago, before crimson-walled Boundaries cut the land into Fragments, isolating their inhabitants. Cor Volucra works alongside his father but dreams of swordplay; however, no amount of sword skills can defend against the births of deformed livestock or the blighted crops that sicken villagers and killed Cor's mother when he was six.



Before her death, she claimed Cor was "important," and that someday, he'd learn why. Now 23, Cor discovers a gap in the Boundary and meets an Elemental (a horned, winged warden) in the next Fragment, who explains that his kind are dying; Cor must unite other Elementals to save humankind from ruin. Throughout, amusing political and pop-culture Easter eggs abound: Lothar, the tyrant, displays many aspects of Donald Trump and Elon Musk; his spokesperson recalls Trump's campaign manager, Kellyanne Conway, and press secretary, Kayleigh McEnany. The story includes heavy alliteration, but Vobh pulls it off, and readers will appreciate the rhythmic, artful prose. With wondrous landscapes and illuminating character descriptions, this novel is simply splendid.

Youth

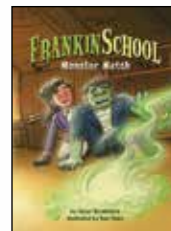
Frankinschool: Monster Match.

By Caryn Rivadeneira. Illus. by Dani Jones.

2023. 112p. Red Chair, \$16.99 (9781643712413).

In Rivadeneira's middle-grade book, Fred is

sick and misses an author's visit to his school. When he returns, he finds the writer has mistakenly inscribed "To Frank" on his book. Classmate Luisa, who calls herself Princesa Maria Luisa Octavia, sits next to Fred and regularly calls him "dumb." When she sees the inscription in his book, she teases him, saying that while he might be Fred at home, he's "Frank in school." When their teacher asks the class to write a "what if . . ." story, Luisa's words inspire Fred to write a humorous poem about turning into "Frankinschool." Then suddenly, a green



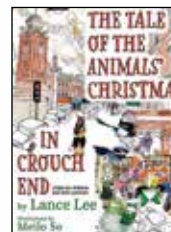
fog rolls in; Fred has become the Frankenstein-like monster Frankinschool, and Luisa has become an actual princess, while the other students have dozed off. The two must contend with the effects of a strange potion and a scheming ghost. Rivadeneira deftly creates relatable characters and delivers smart, sometimes snappy, dialogue. The plot delightfully explodes into an imaginative, hilarious situation, delivering poignant lessons on forgiveness, friendship, and fairness. Young readers will enjoy every page of this slightly spooky, utterly charming tale.

The Tale of the Animals' Christmas in Crouch End: A Fable for Children and Their Parents.

By Lance Lee. Illus. by Meilo So.

2023. 80p. Lwl, paper, \$14.99 (9798218181659).

Lee's enchanting holiday-themed chapter book offers a modern-day, urban *Wind in the Willows* set in London and populated with



mannered, Beatrix Potter-like animals. When "the heaviest rains anyone could remember" drench the North London neighborhood of Crouch End, gentlemanly Rufus the Red Fox finds his elegant den in dire shape: his floors "slimed," his bed floating. "He didn't dare use his stove for fear of electrocuting himself." A new neighbor, introducing himself as "Marvin Mole, Builder Extraordinaire," is wary of Rufus because "he is a Fox—after all!" Yet Rufus hires Marvin, quelling his predatory instincts. Renovations underway, Rufus wanders the streets of Crouch End, growing "ever more conscious of all the strange Christmas behaviors of people." Mole explains, "They go mad this way every year." As other animals chime in, they challenge Rufus to ask the fairies about Christmas, since he's rumored to have second sight. So's illustrations blend loose sketches and scribbled color with precisely rendered animals fetchingly dressed in quaint attire. Lee's contemporary narrative is a timeless tale of caring, sharing, and community, with a glorious dollop of magic. Effortlessly charming, this is an instant holiday classic.