



The Stars Beneath Our Feet

David Barclay Moore

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"The right story at the right time. . . . It's not just a narrative; it's an experience. It's the novel we've been waiting for." —*The New York Times*

A boy tries to steer a safe path through the projects in Harlem in the wake of his brother's death in this outstanding debut novel that celebrates community and creativity.

MICHAEL B. JORDAN TO DIRECT MOVIE ADAPTATION!

A PUBLISHER'S WEEKLY BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR!

SIX STARRED REVIEWS!

It's Christmas Eve in Harlem, but twelve-year-old Lolly Rachpaul and his mom aren't celebrating. They're still reeling from his older brother's death in a gang-related shooting just a few months earlier. Then Lolly's mother's girlfriend brings him a gift that will change everything: two enormous bags filled with Legos. Lolly's always loved Legos, and he prides himself on following the kit instructions exactly. Now, faced with a pile of building blocks and no instructions, Lolly must find his own way forward.

His path isn't clear—and the pressure to join a "crew," as his brother did, is always there. When Lolly and his friend are beaten up and robbed, joining a crew almost seems like the safe choice. But building a fantastical Lego city at the community center provides Lolly with an escape—and an unexpected bridge back to the world.

David Barclay Moore paints a powerful portrait of a boy teetering on the edge—of adolescence, of grief, of violence—and shows how Lolly's inventive spirit helps him build a life with firm foundations and open doors.

More Praise for *The Stars Beneath Our Feet*:

"A fast and furious read in which we meet some amazing people, people that stay with us. David Barclay Moore is an exciting new voice. We definitely haven't heard the last of his brilliance." —Jacqueline Woodson, Newbery Honor and National Book Award–winning of *Brown Girl Dreaming*

"*The Stars Beneath Our Feet* is about the weight of the world on the back of a child, and the creative tools necessary to alleviate that pressure. I found myself rooting for Lolly, and you will too." —Jason Reynolds, Coretta Scott King Honor Winner for *As Brave As You*

"*The Stars Beneath Our Feet* is the book I've been waiting for. Rarely do you see this side of New York rendered so authentically and generously. So much heart here. And so much talent." —Matt de la Peña, Newbery Award–winning author of *Last Stop on Market Street*

The Stars Beneath Our Feet Details

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From Reader Review *The Stars Beneath Our Feet* for online ebook

Amy says

So, I feel like this will be an unpopular opinion, but I just was not that impressed with this book. What I hoped was going to be a clear Middle Grade alternative to the other rock star texts *Dear Martin* and *The Hate U Give*, but it was nowhere near those books, IMO. While the subject matter was similar (a young black boy in Harlem is dealing with the death of his older brother and trying to figure out what to do with his life-art vs gangs), the writing and character development was lacking. The story was choppy. The character was unlikable at times, and not in a way that made you hope for his growth or change, but just in a way that made you annoyed with him. His friends were shallow character sketches that never felt fleshed out. The side stories did not develop enough to feel relevant or important.

In the end, not for me. Right now I have it on order for my library, but am not sure if I will keep it or not since I wasn't that impressed.

Lola says

I don't see what everyone else sees in this book.

Perhaps that is because I have read so many, many, many books featuring characters dealing with the loss of a loved one? I want to say that is probably the case, but the truth is I constantly read these books and I tend to enjoy them as a general rule.

So what happened? The writing is lovely. It drew me in from the start. I was curious about the story and I certainly could not complain about the cool cover. But it took time for me to understand why there was tension between the characters,

Someone died. Who died? Oh, his brother. Really, how? Well, you'll have to wait until I'm ready to share that part. Oh, come on, I'd like to understand now, not later. But I'm not ready to share that with you! And what's up with his father, what's going on? It's complicated...

I felt confused a lot. And even when I wasn't anymore, when the hero finally decided to shed some light on issues, I realized there is absolutely no plot and the little boy is just wandering around, making connections, pretending to be okay, trying to live on after the tragic death of his brother, doing mundane things like buying gifts,

I was not so interested. Lolly is a boy I really wanted to connect with, but he made it so hard, because he's not open about his emotions and he's so quiet, calm and reserved that I couldn't get to know him through his entourage. I don't know if anyone, except maybe his mother, even knows him very well.

Couldn't finish it. Was bored.

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CaseyTheCanadianLesbrarian says

Really great, kinda wish I hadn't done the audiobook cause I know I missed some things. But holy crap a kid dealing with a lot of grown-up things. Also: really great to see representation of queer people of colour in a middle grade book (the main character's mom is a lesbian).

Nic Stone says

A beautiful glimpse into the life of a grieving young boy on the cusp of a number of decisions that will determine the direction of his life, my favorite thing about this amazing book was the way it perfectly highlighted the contradictory nature of black-male adolescence: Lolly is very much a kid who dreams of greatness and loves creating things with Legos, but because of his circumstances, he's forced to think about very adult things.

Highly recommend!

Wesaun says

Disclaimer: I have no knowledge of changes that have occurred in the final version.

I am not a well-read reader when it comes to middle grade novels and so this book did not suit me so well due to the level at which it was at. But this was a book that I wish had been put in my hands when I was in that middle-grade books stage, just to see black kids not for any other reason. This book and its characters came alive with its cast of marginalized characters. I loved reading a book with children that were so...real and delightful. I loved the descriptions of Lolly's world and the adventures that he went on. I loved seeing his evolution throughout the story and seeing him grapple with the darkness within himself. That was something that I want to spend time thinking about and that I personally haven't really seen in the books that I have read. I have seen characters deal with dark circumstances and insecurities, like anyone else. But dealing with the darkness coming from within that sprouted from those circumstances, I don't know if what I am saying will make any sense or sound any different but it was different. Moore made it so...fresh even when parts could come off as trite. I loved how for most of the novel though some parts were shorter than others, most of it wasn't filler. The varied vernacular was...stimulating from time to time. I loved Rosamund, especially. She was beautiful and complex, though I am unsure of the accurate representation of autism, sometimes it made me uneasy, and am not sure how correctly it was done. Someone else would have to weigh in that was actually autistic.

Now for the things I didn't love. Some circumstances in the last few chapters seemed unnecessary and gave off an annoying, filler vibe. There was a cast of queer characters within this novel. If I'm giving Moore the benefit of the doubt, I would say it was to normalize or to include a realistic variety of characters considering the setting is where one might expect a variety of people. However, the way these characters are portrayed is unsettling. Moore chose to include caricatures. I wish I knew why. These characters were not respected or treated with decency in this novel. They were constantly picked at, poked, and degraded. I'm not saying that that isn't real life. I'm just saying the way that was portrayed made me uneasy. He (referring to Moore) seemed to be trying to regard these characters with respect but failed miserably.

Jonathan got constantly mentioned but almost no development or anything really attached to him besides being called "limp wrist" on repeated occasions. The reader will never learn much of who he really is, just see other characters make fun of him in what maybe is supposed to be affectionate but really just comes off as the characters being disgusted with him for nothing besides his identity. There was no breakdown of discrimination in this novel, at least when it came to Jonathan. There was no setup of characters saying these things and then someone speaking out against it. It just was silently carried along and that validated it in a way that could be considered hurtful but maybe some would just shrug at. I don't really think it is a healthy thing for kids to be exposed to and could just perpetuate the cruelty of making fun of boys that come off in a way that is different than the others which always leads to bigger problems as we should all be well aware of by now.

Aston Stewart was all right, in that the character seemed confident, but he was wronged in this novel every step of the way, by the other adults he interacted in this novel and subconsciously by Lolly? I found it very confusing especially considering Lolly's mother, which you will find out in the first pages of the novel, should technically be more accepting of Aston. I found the reactions when Aston was introduced appalling.

Butteray Jones was made fun of which made me uneasy for kids like him reading this novel. I feel like any attempt to try to support him afterwards in this novel was half-baked and not well done in a way that would combat the already negative message and its impact. I don't think any of the malice in this book was intended, because no one could be this bad, but it is there and I found it nauseating and it was perplexing. I felt like there was some back and forth underlying message that ended up being unclear static. It didn't fit to me since the book was going so well to stop every once in a while to include characters and basically knock them down.

This book will end up, unfortunately, sending a message to children that are like the characters that were made fun of that there is something wrong with them. That they might be sort of accepted but remind them that who they are could never be, at least not completely and might encourage other children to make fun of them which, as I said before, always leads to more problems that keep on the hateful society that we are burning in now.

And since the book is so lovely in other aspects, I found it a combination of deeply disparaging and confusing. If queer characters are just going to be made fun of, why even include them? It just clouds the positive message that you were trying to send with fat raindrops of negativity that might be found imperceptible to some but what about those who pick up on that message? What then for them? I hope that Moore improves his handling of characters not like himself (if that happens to be so and if not then I apologise for my assumptions that are based off of the book). No one can be perfect, of course, but this book would have been way better with a little help from sensitivity readers who would have caught these details. This book was, in the end, bittersweet. It was full of the potential to be beautiful and to bloom and bloom it started, and then suddenly stopped midway and wilted. I will recommend it but only for those who wouldn't be triggered or as deeply disappointed by this sort of message being put out during this time or those that do not notice or are not good at paying attention to details and reoccurring underlying messages.

Autumn says

So on point with the dialogue and perspectives of tweens growing up in urban America -- still kids, like any

twelve or thirteen year old, but sometimes dealing with some very grown-up stuff as best they can.

Super smart about the extra pressures placed on young men and women of color to grow up fast.

I love this book for taking place in an afterschool program, for honoring play and creativity, and for the hilarious sweetness of the characters' perspectives.

Oh, and did I mention it's LGBTQIA friendly in the chilliest of ways?

EDIT: OK, after reading a few reviews, I see that some folks are concerned with the way Lolly and his friends talk to and about one another. To me, that honesty is a strength of the book. Kids his age would crack on Butteray and Rose (at least initially) b/c of their own insecurities and need to fit in. Depicting the behavior is not the same as condoning, and it makes Lolly much more realistic to me.

Alicia Farmer says

Books like this make me wish I taught middle school English. In addition to the poor, white boys of the American Heartland in "The Outsiders," or the island-bound white schoolboys in the "Lord of the Flies", I'd have my students read about poor dark-skinned boys on Manhattan Island that populate this book. And not just boys. Girls, too. And adults. And people who are gay, who are on the autism spectrum, who have disabilities. It's an inclusive story where everyone is doing their best to survive. I hate that cliché (which I'd have my class discuss), but it seems apt here.

Tween-aged kids are flirting with adulthood in Harlem. In the projects. Do they join the gang whose members keep threatening and harassing them? Do they find false security behind owning a gun? Do they follow their creative impulses or turn hard and abandon them?

There's a lot going on in this story, not least the recent death by shooting of the brother of the main character, Lolly. Lolly has the constant reminder of his brother's empty bed to remind him of his loss. He also has a largely absent father, whose abandonment he feels keenly. Lolly's mother and her girlfriend are loving and active in his life, but they're trying to earn a living in a world that doesn't welcome people of their race, gender and sexual orientation.

Lolly's solace is Legos. He escapes to imaginary kingdoms that he builds. His passion leads him on an adventure in which he makes new friends, gains acclaim, makes NYC his own, and discovers the content of his character. Along the way we readers meet the "people in his neighborhood," from drug dealers to street vendors, store proprietors to grandmothers. We even glimpse another wily but vulnerable being: a coyote in St. Nicholas park.

I loved this story's loving core and gentleness with its characters (even though police violence and gun death make their appearances). The author's afterward endeared David Barclay Moore to me. He wrote this for kids like Lolly, so they can see themselves in books, too, not just the Pony Boys and Piggys school gives us.

Katrina says

2.5 stars. This book is kind of all over the place. We have: a dead brother, a gay mom, an absentee father, a girl with autism, legos, architecture, and gangs. Did I mention the girl detectives and the coyote?(!) (Fortunately those turn out to be a very small side plot, but I was really wondering where we were going for awhile!) And somehow even with all of that stuffed in, nothing really happens. There's not much of a plot, it just kind of meanders around. There's way too much dialogue that seems to be included only to show "how people talk" without achieving anything in the scene. And the end gets awfully preachy.

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

It's Christmas Eve, and Wallace "Lolly" Rachpaul, 12, is walking along 125th Street in Harlem, trying to get home as quickly as he can. Lolly has a new pair of sneakers from his mostly absent dad and he's not about to let the two older boys following him snatch them off his feet. But when Lolly quickly turns the corner of 125th Street and 8th Avenue, the two boys abruptly stop, because Lolly lives in a world of imaginary protected borders, each border guarded by its own crew, and crews know better than to cross those lines.

Lolly, who is West Indian, lives in the St. Nicholas House, a public housing project on West 127th Street, with his mom and his mom's girlfriend Yvonne, a security guard in a large toy store. His older brother, Jermaine had gotten involved with a drug dealing crew and was shot and killed outside a Bronx nightclub just a few months back and, while Lolly is still trying to come to terms with his loss, he is also trying to resist the pressure to join a crew.

One thing that Lolly does like is Legos, and he has painstakingly put together all kinds of kits, following the instructions to the letter. But late Christmas Eve, he takes them all apart, suddenly wanting to build something else, something of his own. Later, when Yvonne comes home on Christmas morning, she has two garbage bags full of Legos for Lolly, and just in time. Pretty soon, Lolly has built a castle so big his mom is complaining about how much space it is taking up, so he is allowed to build in an empty storeroom in the after school program he goes to, run by Mr. Ali, an understanding, but underfunded social worker.

Soon, Lolly is joined by Big Alice, a special needs student suffering her own family loss, and who never speaks to anyone, but stays by herself reading. In the Lego room, she helps herself to Lolly's Legos (Yvonne brings him more and more bags full) and begins building her own buildings, which resemble their neighborhood perfectly. At first, Lolly resents Big Alice, but soon the two are taking trips into midtown Manhattan, exploring the different buildings found in a architecture book Lolly was given for Christmas. Eventually, the two begin to build Harmonie, an enormous alien world, together.

All the while, Lolly, and his Dominican best friend, Vega are being harassed by the same two boys who followed Lolly on Christmas Eve. Part of a crew that wants Lolly and Vega to join them, they soon resort to violence as a means of persuasion. And it almost works...but then things in Lolly's life take another totally unexpected turn.

The Stars Beneath Our Feet is a debut novel for David Barclay Moore. It is an all-to-realistic coming of age contemporary novel, and Lolly is a wonderfully flawed character full of contradictions (like choosing Legos over video games). As Lolly tries to reassemble his life through the metaphor of Lego building blocks, life on the city streets is also becoming more and more complicated. Luckily, Moore has surrounded him with

people who are caring and supportive - his gay mom, Yvonne, who is trying to help him through the grieving process by giving him Legos, the only thing she can do, Mr. Ali, who has recognized that Lolly needs to work through the trauma of losing his brother so violently, even his dad comes through, though not as much as Lolly would like. And their story threads together with those of Lolly, Big Alice, and Vega make this such a full-bodied novel.

Harlem is also as much a character in this novel as anyone, providing a living backdrop for Lolly's important slice-of-life story. But, the danger those street hold for young men of color like Lolly isn't something most people know or even think about and Moore has captured it with brutal honesty, compassion, and even humor.

From the moment I started reading *The Stars Beneath Our Feet*, I couldn't put it down. It may not be a book for everyone, but it is certainly a worthwhile read and, I think, a real eye-opener for many. Moore's final message in this novel - it is not just family, but also community that can help change things for kids.

This book is recommended for readers age 10+

This book was an ARC received from the publisher, Alfred A. Knopf

The Reading Countess says

With writing that is as much raw as it is honest, Moore draws the reader into a Harlem family rampant with issues. Divorce, gang activity, loss of a child, autism, and poverty thread throughout the book, but this is not a bleak read. No, it encourages the reader to do what is right even if it is hard. It reminds the reader that though it may feel as if you are alone, we really are all connected. And *The Stars Beneath Our Feet* is a nod to creativity, to uniqueness, to being open to all types of people, as well as a love song to poetry and the strength of the teacher-student bond. I loved the narration-Lolly is a remarkable young man. My one complaint, if it is one, is the final sentence in the book. It reminded me of how I teach my kids to write their personal narratives-to end strongly with what Nancie Atwell calls a "so-what." In my humble opinion, Moore is capable of more than a ten year old's 1-2 punch.

"...when you die, they bury you, but your soul flies to the stars. Your mama, your daddy-they were buried under the ground, but they're stars now, girl, stars beneath our feet."

"I had learned it was better to share your stuff. You get back more than you think you would."

"Sometimes, Wallace...you just do what you know is right, even if it seems dumb at the time."

"...I had learned the most important thing: the decisions you make can become your life. Your choices are you."

Shenwei says

an important and lovely story about friendship, creativity and developing healthy coping skills

Nat says

I feel like it takes a lot to be surprised by a realistic fiction novel anymore... and *The Stars Beneath Our Feet*

definitely did (surprise me, that is), but slowly; as slowly and methodically as a twelve-year-old constructing a city out of Legos. I finished it yesterday and needed to think before reviewing about what was most valuable to me about it. Here's what I've settled on: the plot was both creative and believable, the main character was a twelve year old I could both root for and recognize, the messages were both important and without preachiness, and the relationships in the story felt both intentional and pure. This is a *balanced* novel, y'all. Recommend to all of my Goodreads friends, bookstagram friends, friend-friends, and collectors of good stories.

Jaeden_C1 says

When I started reading this book I just thought that even though this boy Lolly is living in a harsh environment of losing the brother and having his parents get divorced. Still having a creative and positive mindset. I thought that he use lego to maintain his sanity.

Jessica says

Wonderful, heartfelt look at how a young boy in Harlem deals with grief and growing up. An interesting look at creativity and art as well, and perfect for those who aren't quite ready for *The Hate U Give*, as this is solidly middle grade.

Amy says

12 year old Wallace (Lolly) is grieving the death of his brother while trying to navigate life in St. Nick, the low-income housing development in Harlem where he lives with his mother. As Lolly pursues an interest in architecture expressed through legos and photographs, he and his best friend are being recruited by one gang and routinely followed and attacked by another. Lolly wants to avoid gang life, but it is hard to see another path. Lolly finds support at a community center and from neighborhood mentors. The setting is vividly described and glimpses of a wide variety of cultural backgrounds (Dominican & Trinidadian to name a few) bring depth to family traditions shared with the readers. Lolly is at a turning point in his life and Barclay deftly navigates the readers through his confusion, grief and complicated decision making process. This is an excellent choice for grade 5 and up.
