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Small Steps

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Sachar is known in this country for the brilliant *Holes*, a novel whose critical and popular success still reverberates nearly ten years after its original publication. This is, in one sense, a sequel. It follows the post Camp Green Lake career of one of Stanley's fellow inmates, Theodore Johnson, aka Armpit. But whereas *Holes* created its own slightly skewed world with some of the characteristics of a modern folk tale, *Small Steps*, while still a beguiling and unsettling mix of the implausible and the all too believable, is more firmly grounded in a recognisable social reality. Armpit, now digging holes for a living in his home town of Austin, Texas, is set on turning his life around. The small steps he needs to take at work and in high school will enable him, he hopes, to lose the Armpit tag once and for all. His family don't have much faith. He's big, young, African-American, and an ex con. Sometimes strangers cross the road to avoid him. And he's still under the spell of another ex-graduate of Camp Green Lake, the fast talking X-Ray, who is relying on Armpit's savings to bankroll a barely legal scam. This involves touting tickets for a sell-out concert by the new African-American teen rock sensation, Kaira DeLeon. Armpit is a gentle giant whose naiveté and optimism provide equal opportunities for victimisation and heroism. The manner in which his life becomes entangled with Kaira, the cosseted prisoner of music industry success and her greedy manager, has all the qualities of a gossip magazine fairy tale. This is offset by sudden revelations of how society's expectations can, in one violent moment, kick Armpit right back to Camp Green Lake and worse. Sachar's narrative is spare, direct and idiomatic, apparently effortless, even offering entirely convincing rock lyrics. The story's told from Armpit's point of view, but with a sardonic edge that nudges the reader to know and fear more than Armpit himself does. It's a wry, engaging and alarming book that, like *Holes*, manages to be true to both the American Dream and its sometimes less than appealing reality. CB

Running Order:

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