

**You're in *high school* now:** Julian's Sophomore Year,  
Part 1  
Eldot

Diphra Enterprises [perfect bound] 19.95

600 pages ISBN 978-0-9966325-3-9

Reviewed May, 2019



In this last (so far) of Eldot's Julian novels, we join 15 year-old Julian Forrest as he begins his first year of high school. Acclimating to the new environment of unfamiliar faces, different classes, different clothes, teenage girls, and women contrasts with the previous novels, where Julian was in Scout Camp—the female sex was nowhere in sight. A talented artist, Julian continues to sharpen his craft, evolving and perfecting his technique. He's still involved in scouts, and spends time with his scoutmaster crush, Mark, when he can.

But now there are all kinds of other experiences. Biology, Geometry, Art Class. His mother Francine, and her busybody employer Geraldine continually push him to interact romantically with girls. An especially unpleasant girl named Rita invites him to the Sadie Hawkins dance. An accidental collision in the hall results in gaining a new friend named Randall. He and Randall are invited to a campout by friends of friends; an arcane "Initiation" takes place that weekend. While sexy, it is not an altogether positive experience for the two.

In addition to Julian, Eldot explores the ruminations and lives of other characters, some more peripheral to Julian than others. We come to understand Francine's (Julian's mother) fears and hopes for her son. Her resentment of Julian's father and his absence from their life is explained. Mark's wife Pat cares for him, and encourages him to get out and find romance again. The passing of his partner Erik six years earlier is no longer a viable excuse. Her colleague Peter helps him navigate the underground opportunities in the big city to explore life of men who must keep one foot in the closet. Attention is given to Danny and Tony and Nick and Tom, Julian's friends from Scout Camp. Time is spent

with Randall, his painfully shy new friend, who plays clarinet, loves photography, and aches for a sense of belonging.

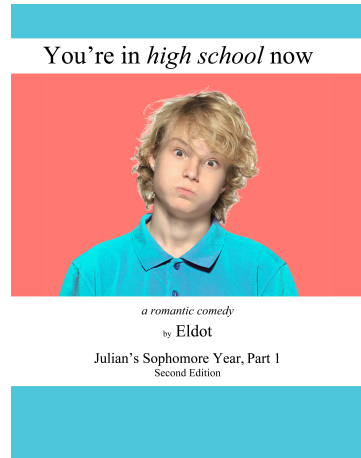
Julian is gay, but consistent with the closeted 1960's, this is only known to Mark, and friends of the same orientation. Eldot manages a difficult balance in depicting Julian. He is kind and friendly, genuine, energetic, smart and phenomenally attractive to both genders. Despite this, Julian is never arrogant or full of himself. His caring impulses are intuitive and touching. He gives off a profoundly innocent vibe, but he's gung-ho when it comes to exploring his same-gender erotic impulses. Which is not to say he's cavalier or promiscuous. He's simply unencumbered by shame or guilt over sexuality. Eldot could have easily fallen back on Julian's well-established personality from the previous books. Instead, Julian continues to learn, mature and grow as a young man. His identity changes in both salient and subtle ways.

One of Eldot's strengths is his gift for imbuing the narrative with humanity. He creates a very complete, detailed world in which stereotypes (especially queer ones) are avoided, and the rare occurrence of warmth and tenderness between teenage boys is included. He carefully creates opportunities for this, and yet they feel canny, never contrived. Most of the key characters are gay males, but there's plenty of differentiation, quirkiness and nuance. Apart from their sexual identities, Eldot creates a milieu of boys who (just like the straight ones) all deal with the same problems: earning money, unwanted erections, demanding appetites, the goofy fun of nonchalant belches and sonorous farts. Also, it's a relief to find a novel that doesn't lionize jocks, alphas, prissy cheerleaders and the rest of the mindless mob. Time after time, in defiance of our expectations Eldot surprises us with his imaginative turns and events.

Having grown familiar with Eldot's treatment of sex between males, I have come to appreciate his frank, unflinching approach. It's never lascivious or hyperbolic. Never reductive or quaint. He doesn't idealize or diminish. Eldot respects naive young men as they process just exactly how homoeroticism fits into their lives, and the impact it has on their emotions. It's not unusual for men to sometimes share pleasure outside of intense heartfelt devotion, and Eldot neither ignores or condemns this. When Randall and Julian have their unfortunate involvement with older boys (and their irresponsible behavior) we grasp their mixed feelings of

gratification and being wounded. You're in High School Now is an absorbing, compelling, sentient and comprehensive addition to the story of Julian Forrest, a young man who makes the world better (like George Bailey) for most every soul he touches.

#### QRS Highest Recommendation



---

**Quality Review Service**