

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

BARR'S MEADOW

Eldot

Diphra Enterprises LLC (283 pp.) ISBN: 978-0-9966325-5-3

BOOK REVIEW

A debut novel tells the story of a young gay Scout's sexual awakening at camp. Twelve-year-old Julian Forrest has been raised by his single mother, never knowing his father. He loves drawing and being a Cub Scout. He has even made a Scouting journal full of drawings of his activities. He has recently become aware of his sexual desire, which is wound up in his habit of watching a neighbor, the adult Mark Schaefer, come home from work every day. When Mark comes over to the house to invite Julian to join his Scouting troop, the youngster can barely contain his excitement—or hide his erection.

Two years later, Julian gets to attend the annual two-week Scouting summer camp at Walker Lake. By this point, Mark is aware of Julian's crush, though he is unsure how to proceed: "What bothered Mark—a little, not a lot—was that Julian had become a presence in his thoughts...*at this point it's only a presence...but it's something new...*it felt pleasant, it made him feel light." The first two days at Walker Lake will prove transformative for many people, including Nick Harrison and Tom Dawson, members of the troop's leadership patrol. In the all-male environment of a Scouting camp, Julian quickly discovers some of the rules of his new masculinity—and a few things about his burgeoning sexuality as well.

Set in the 1960s, this series opener deftly depicts feelings of childhood nostalgia, as evidenced in Eldot's wistful prose: "At last the sausage patties and pancakes were ready and waiting in the oven. Julian helped Danny put out the OJ and milk. *oh! a bubbling sound—the coffee!* He rushed over to the stove to watch." But the author dwells heavily on the sexual thoughts of several characters, including the teenage Julian. While these aren't necessarily erotic, there is an undeniable romanticism to them. This will likely make many readers decidedly uncomfortable, particularly those scenes that deal with the attraction between minors and adults. Eldot may argue that he's depicting an experience common to young gay men, but if this book isn't crossing a line, it's walking right up to it.

An uneven coming-of-age tale.