

The Champions:

Julian's Private Scrapbook, Book 5

Eldot

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Eldot's fifth and final book in *The Julian's Private Scrapbook Series* **The Champions** follows Julian's progress as he reaches the last of his 14-day stay at Walker Boy Scout Camp. Julian is only 14 going on 15, with all the best qualities of being that age. His gift for drawing is truly phenomenal, yet he's humble. He's sentient and guileless and adventurous and impulsive, but grounded by a sense of moral responsibility and consideration for others. When he discovers two of his friends are lovers, he's discreet and respects their privacy. Julian intuitively, spontaneously knows how to make others feel deeply appreciated and good about themselves. He sincerely enjoys making others happy. In this last novel, he reveals a gift for showing the profound beauty and character of others (like Sarge and Leonard) in their portraiture, without realizing he's doing it. His relationship with Mark has matured from effusive crush to one of mutual respect, deep caring and empathy.

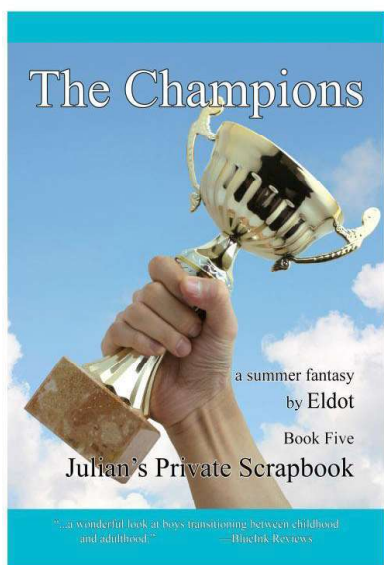
Anyone familiar with this series knows that Eldot explores the various kinds of sexual attachment that happens between young men, and sometimes, intergenerationally, as well. There are circle jerks and strip poker, impromptu hand jobs and kissing and fellatio. There is casual buddy sex and intense opportunities and sincere, full blown love affairs. Often what begins as something brash and reckless evolves into monumental emotions. Eldot could have easily turned this series into a ridiculous, torrid caricature of queer lust, or a prolonged, insipid romp. Instead he gives us an elaborate background of what makes boys and men tick, when they are sharing each other's company. Attraction emerges in various manifestations, among teenage boys and grown men alike. No one is immune. Erections appear in all kinds of places: the tents, the lake, the dining room, and on the trail. What makes *The Julian Series* so brilliant is the absence of salaciousness. The sex is detailed,

and forthright, but not exactly graphic. It's not vague but it's not smutty. In this final volume of the series, I was overwhelmed by numerous moments of men vigilantly searching for the honorable choice—the conscientious path—and interactions marked by utterly canny warmth, devotion and tenderness. Yes, tenderness.

Just like other camps, the session culminates in contests, awards (merit badges) a banquet, promises and sad goodbyes. The scouts work out strategies for water polo and relays. Who's fastest, who shows an aptitude, who needs to be included. They practice their skits and work out seating arrangements and prepare speeches. They choose menu items and make presentations. Understanding they will soon be returning home, they try to resolve problems when and how they can. Eldot creates a very palpable, authentic sense of humanity in this gathering, weaving in occasions of humor, grace, panic, surprise and ingenuity. Situations like a scoutmaster carrying an injured young man for two miles, a cantankerous veteran transformed by genuine affection, sincere contrition expressed in the midst of adversity: all serve to imbue **The Champions** with substance and memorable experiences.

Speaking as a gay man born in the late fifties, it's hard to describe the impact this series has had on me. Psychologically, spiritually, emotionally. Being queer and teenaged (especially then) could be extremely painful, because it's a time in your life when everything seems disproportionately urgent, when you're desperate to fit in and must carry a secret that you never will. And we're not out of the woods yet.

The profound gift of this narrative is the creation of a world where same-gender sexuality isn't depicted as some grotesque violation of human goodness and desire for meaningful, physical connection. Instead, like any other aspect of mankind's identity, it's treated as an action sometimes whimsical, sometimes sloppy, sometimes exquisite, sometimes passionate, sometimes ridiculous. Eldot has the wisdom to grasp that sometimes a guy is happy to be with another guy, in that special way. And whatever comes afterward, it needn't be traumatic or vile or filled with regret.



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