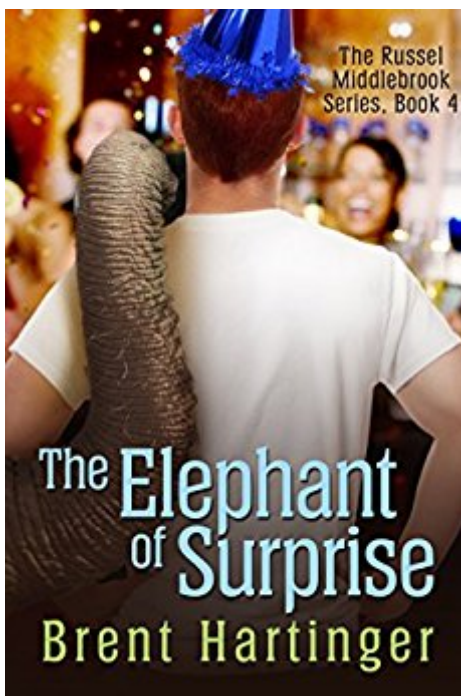


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# The Elephant Of Surprise (The Russel Middlebrook Series Book 4)



## Synopsis

Book 4 in the Lambda Award-winning Russel Middlebrook Series! People aren't always what they seem to be. Sometimes we even surprise ourselves. So discovers seventeen-year-old Russel Middlebrook in *The Elephant of Surprise*, a stand-alone sequel to Brent Hartinger's landmark 2003 gay young adult novel *Geography Club* (which has now been adapted as a feature film co-starring Scott Bakula and Nikki Blonsky). In this latest book, Russel and his friends Min and Gunnar are laughing about something they call the Elephant of Surprise – the tendency for life to never turn out as expected. Sure enough, Russel soon happens upon a hot but mysterious homeless activist named Wade, even as he's drawn back to an old flame named Kevin. Meanwhile, Min is learning surprising things about her girlfriend Leah, and Gunnar just wants to be left alone to pursue his latest technology obsession. But the elephant is definitely on the move in all three of their lives. Just who is Wade and what are he and his friends planning? What is Leah hiding? And why is Gunnar taking naked pictures of Kevin in the shower? *The Elephant of Surprise* includes Hartinger's trademark combination of humor and romance, angst and optimism. Before the story is over, Russel and his friends will learn that the Elephant of Surprise really does appear when you least expect him – and that when he stomps on you, it really, really hurts.

## Book Information

File Size: 1580 KB

Print Length: 228 pages

Publisher: BK Books; 1 edition (February 7, 2013)

Publication Date: February 7, 2013

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00BG3EG1O

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #515,052 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #74

in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > LGBT Issues #681

## Customer Reviews

I loved this book which wrapped up the story arc of the teen romance of Russel Middlebrook and Kevin Land. Two lonely teenage boys both wanting someone to love and be loved by them in return. Russel, the first of the two to come out, was both loveable and annoying at times with his inability to grasp the difference between infatuation and real love until the end. Then there was Kevin, who took longer to come out, but understood the difference and recognized love can sometimes mean sacrificing your own happiness. It was Kevin's growth as a character that I found the most appealing in these books. Although I've read the author, Brent Hartinger, stated he would not be writing a stand alone volume of the story through Kevin's eyes I hope he at some point reconsiders. The reader always had a grasp of Kevin's appeal to Russel but I'd like to see through Kevin's eyes what drew him to Russel.

"The Elephant of Surprise" has been long anticipated by impatient Brent Hartinger fans - and many of us are adults who are more generally fans of YA novels. Do we hope to recapture our own teen years (why would one ever want to do that?); or is it simply that one never forgets one's teen experiences, whether good or bad, no matter how much of life we have lived since? Whatever the reason for our ongoing interest in YA novels, Brent Hartinger never lets us down. Russel Middlebrook is beginning to fully understand what he and his friends jokingly refer to as the elephant of surprise - the twists and turns that life throws at you, causing both happiness and pain, but also offering you adventure and excitement. For all the interaction with the "freegans" whose hidden world becomes a centerpiece of the book's action, the real narrative purpose of Hartinger's latest is to continue exploring the three "L's" of teen experience - Life as they are learning to live it; Love as they are struggling to understand it; and loyalty, as they test its boundaries and strengths. The new characters of Wade and Venus; as well as the long-standing figures of Kevin (Russel's ex) and Otto (Russel's current BF), each bring a different perspective to the straightforward complications of high school. Hartinger's voice is refreshingly crisp and bright. In a field full of endangered teens suffering terribly, Hartinger's characters know pain, but it is the typical pain of teen life. Russel Middlebrook and his best friends Gunnar and Min are vivid and clearly drawn. They are good kids, and intelligent; but they make stupid choices and think in remarkably illogical ways. Because, endearingly, all of these kids are just that - still kids. They still see life from that wide-eyed perspective of youth, all the

while confident of their own wisdom and adorably clueless as to their own complete lack of adult experience. And that's the point: adult experience would hamper them, and it is the freedom of ignorance and hope that lets them grow and learn through their adventures. Of course, it is hugely important to me - and to many teen readers - that Russel is gay. So few YA novelists take the gay teen to heart, and Russel is a heroic figure simply because he is so normal. He has dealt with coming out, but still hasn't quite figured out love. On the other hand he is fully committed to his friends, and still yearns for life to be more exciting than it is. Hartinger's teens don't really relate to adults at all - they relate to each other and to the reader. So you have to read his books as a teenager, whether you are or not, since that's how you'll best appreciate its pleasures.

I didn't like this book...well no I tell a lie, I did like the last chapter where we see a closing point to Kevin and Russel, the rest I could have done without. Wow, these Freegans were nice, the most I met are a kind of crazy person who does not want anything to do with anyone who isn't into their life style. I had one pull a knife on a friend and I when we threw garbage in her dumpster behind her building..."How dare we dump trash on him when he was in there!" his words not mine. So I must say I was not intrigued by this whole premises in the book. So if I was to reread it I would just skim the Freegan parts and read the parts about Kevin trying to get to Russel. I am glad to know that in a few days the Russel stories will be continuing with Brent's new release on 12/15/14.

They just keep getting better and better! I'm a sucker anyway for coming out stories, and have been delighted by 'Geography Club' and its sequels. It feels true to life, and the plot twists and turns are both unexpected and what happens in real life. 'The Elephant of Surprise' continues the story of Russel and his friends as he grows and develops in high school. Can't wait to read the next one.

By now, just hearing that Russel, Min and Gunnar are returning in a new story makes me smile. I've really come to love these characters and enjoy the opportunity to reconnect with them in a new adventure. Elephant of Surprise is an enjoyable book. It may not have the impact that Geography Club or Order of the Poison Oak did, but it's a good book in its own right. Perhaps the greatest character in this fourth book in the series is Gunnar. It is from him that a lot of the humor and fun come, but that's not what makes him the most interesting character. He comes across as the guy who has all the answers, but he just doesn't know it. As far as I'm concerned, he is the "title" character.

Fast paced and leisurely all at once. Russel makes you crack up at his detailed accounts of life throwing him curveballs. I love the illusion made to elephant of surprise in terms of the size of curveball fate decides to throw at you. As always Russel's commentary coupled with Gunner's humor and insightful view of the world keeps the reader interested. Add in Min's crazy stubborn attitude and you are in for a treat.

I've been a fan of this author for years. When I first picked up Geography Club when I was in high school, I fell in love. I've been following the characters for years, and with each new installment, the development with them increases. This latest book, tops them all though. The way Brent has transformed his characters, is breath taking. Russel is finally becoming who he is supposed to be, and finally being with the guy he loves. Truly amazing. A great read, and a great buy. Really worth it.

This was a fitting end to this series. We complete a little over a year in young Russell 's life as he deals with the trials of young love, coming out and the day to day stresses of being a gay teenager. As with the other books in this series, this should be on every middle school/ high school library shelf in the country.

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