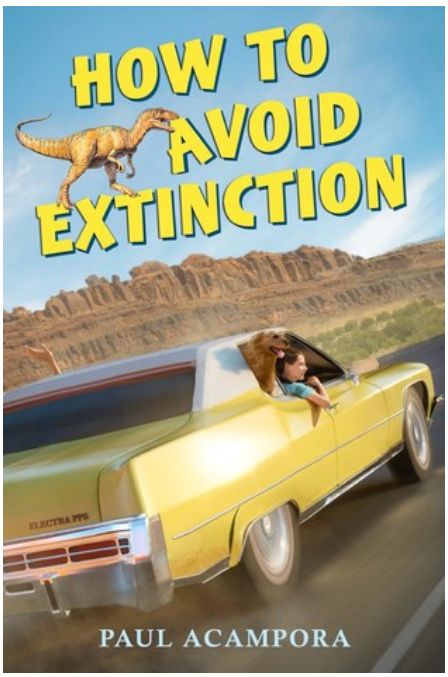

How to Avoid Extinction

Paul Acampora

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How to Avoid Extinction Paul Acampora
For fans of Gary Schmidt and Joan Bauer, a laugh-out-loud intergenerational road trip story from acclaimed author Paul Acampora!

Since the death of his grandfather, Leo's number one chore has been to chase after his grandmother who seems to wander away from home every few days. Now, Gram's decided to roam farther than ever. And despite his misgivings, Leo's going along for the ride. With his seventeen-year-old cousin, Abbey, and an old, gassy dog named Kermit, Leo joins Gram in a big, old Buick to leave their Pennsylvania home for a cross-country road trip filled with foldout maps, family secrets, new friends, and dinosaur bones.

How to Avoid Extinction is a middle-grade comedy about death and food and family and fossils. It's about running away from home and coming back again. For Leo, it's about asking hard questions and hopefully finding some sensible answers. As if good sense has anything to do with it. Against a backdrop of America's stunning size and beauty, it's also about growing up, getting old, dreaming about immortality, and figuring out all the things we can -- and can't -- leave behind.

How to Avoid Extinction Details

Date	:	Published September 27th 2016 by Scholastic Press
ISBN	:	9780545899062
Author	:	Paul Acampora
Format	:	Hardcover 208 pages
Genre	:	Realistic Fiction, Childrens, Middle Grade, Adventure, Young Adult, Family

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From Reader Review How to Avoid Extinction for online ebook

Brenda Kahn says

Laugh-out-loud funny, poignant and wise. I loved the voice. There were a few holes and one or two convenient plot devices that kept me from giving it five stars. My students are not going to notice and are going to love the ride.

Valerie McEnroe says

It's Leo's responsibility to keep track of his gram. It's been almost a year since his granddad died and everyone, especially his gram, is a little bit lost without him. That's why Leo isn't too excited when his gram announces that she wants to see the allosaur bones in Utah. The problem is that they are a couple thousand miles away. But Leo knows his gram. When she gets it in her head to do something, nothing and no one is going to stop her. He grabs a few clothes then hops into his gram's yellow 1973 Ford Electra with his cousin Abbey, and her smelly golden retriever. Their journey will take them to the Field Museum in Chicago, a Filipino family in Nebraska, and finally the Allosaur Museum in Utah.

This is a hilarious road trip book. All the characters have a quirky sense of humor. It reminds me of the National Lampoon's Vacation movie. The things that happen to Leo and the rest of the crew are just as crazy and absurd. Car almost getting towed at the Field Museum. Deciding where to bury the dead dog. Grandma getting an allosaur tattoo. It's funny. It's quick. Shouldn't be hard to find readers for this one.

Cheryl says

Maybe it will be a better inter-generational road trip than Cooney's Hit the Road.
It looks like the author has other books, too, that I should investigate....

Done. Fun, and lighter, not so full of itself as some 'getting to know grandma' type stories. For a younger audience, too, than, for example, Rules of the Road (which is probably the main source of the Bauer comparison). Acampora's story reads, too, like he actually took the trip, more authentic feeling. Lots of interesting bits, like the Filipino family, the Field museum, issues of aging, grief, fragile ecosystems, carburetors, etc.

And, yes, I will investigate more by the author.

Jeannie says

Leo Henderson loved his grandfather. Since Pop died a year ago the family has been at a loss. His grandmother keeps wandering off so Leo must find her. His mother is finding it difficult as she tries, perhaps a bit too hard, to keep the family on an even keel. All this causes strain and some resentment. Then Gram decides that she must get away and take the trip that she and Pop had planned. Not quite willingly Leo and his cousin Abbey literally hop in the car with her. Leo discovers more than dinosaurs. Then Gram takes off again. Leo and Abbey chase across the country after Gram in a 1973 Buick Electra. The story is comic. The

reader can easily visualize the events. But it is a poignant, realistic tale of loss, grief and finding oneself again.

Melanie Dulaney says

When I finished this book, I announced to my husband that it was a 5. He questioned why and I told him that I cried once and laughed out loud three times. “So that’s the scorecard?” he asked. My response was that it was the sigh of satisfaction when I closed it that earned the 5 stars. After I read Paul Acampora’s acknowledgements, I got a hint about why the book evoked such a heart response—Jordan Sonnenblick is one of his encouragers and he’s another author who causes strong emotional reactions from me. School Library Journal compared “How to Avoid Extinction” favorably to Joan Bauer’s books and I wholeheartedly agree and, in fact, noted the similarities to her books before I read SLJ’s comment. I look forward to promoting this 2018-2019 Texas Bluebonnet Award nominee with my grade 4 and 5 library patrons and will happily be able to suggest it to both genders due to strong male and female characters, humor (although not all will crack up during the Beatrix Potter section like I did, but surely everyone will laugh uproariously as Abbey eats those Filipino snacks!), adventure, dinosaurs, a classic car, family drama that many will connect with, and a solid conclusion. I highly recommend this book for grades 4-8 without reservations. And while I realize that is quite an age spread, Leo and Abbey cover that range nicely and they share main character billing, so there is plenty for everyone to enjoy.

Ms. Yingling says

E ARC from Edelweiss Above the Treeline

Since his grandfather passed away, Leo's job is to keep track of his grandmother. She's fiesty, loves doughnuts, and has decided that for the anniversary of her husband's death, she wants to visit a dinosaur site that they were going to travel to together. She knows enough that she shouldn't go alone, so inveigles not only Leo but his cousin Abbey into going with her, since "I'm old. I'm able, and I've got an extremely high credit limit." Soon, the group takes off, armed with doughnuts. The first stop is the Natural History Museum in Chicago, where they meet Honey Buenafe, a student who is heading home to Nebraska. They offer to drive her, since it's on their way and she can help them find the dinosaur site they need in Utah. Her dog, Kermit, comes along. When they get out to Nebraska, they are warmly welcomed by Honey's Filipino family, but Gram takes off on her own, somewhat in part because she wants to stop by Denver to get a tattoo. Leo and Abbey, provisioned with spicy octopus snacks by Mrs. Buenafe, take off after her, eventually calling Leo's mother to come and join their trip. Leo learns a lot about his father, whom he has never met, his mother and her past, and is able to keep his grandmother safe and also help her dreams come true.
Strengths: This is a fantastic mix of funny and serious. Leo is apprehensive about going, but loves his grandmother and wants her to be happy. Abbey is up for a road trip, especially since she would really like to be a paleontologist, and she's great about looking out for everyone. The Buick runs into understandable problems for its age. Honey and her family are so much fun, and a great lesson in how friends can be made under the most surprising circumstances. I also loved how grief was handled-- it's there, but we don't necessarily have to keep going over and over it. In fact, if there are some instances that we want to pretend never happened, that's okay, too. Loved that.
Weaknesses: The dog is old. You have been warned. Could have done without that.
What I really think: Great cover, great story, can't wait to get this one!

Marian says

I don't usually read juvenile fiction, but how to resist a book with an awesome title and a yellow 1973 Buick Electra on the cover? Adventure, interesting characters, wisdom sprinkled throughout, and excellent chapter titles. Buy it for Christmas for your middle-schooler.

Cindy Mitchell *Kiss the Book* says

Acampora, Paul How To Avoid Extinction, 208 pages. Scholastic, OCTOBER 2016. $17. Content: G.

Leo’s Gram has always been a handful, but even more so since his grandfather passed away. Gram gets wind that Leo’s mom is considering putting her in a home because of her shenanigans. Before that can happen, Gram coerces Leo into a cross-country trip to a remote Utah location to check out allosaurus bones, along with his cousin Abbey and Kermit, an old dog. Gram abandons the rest of the group part way through the trip, now Leo and Abbey hope that she is really going where she said she was headed.

The summary of the book does not do this book justice. It combines a great cast of characters with laugh out loud hilarity. I kept reading quips out loud to my husband because I just had to share. I can’t wait to share this with my students.

MS – ESSENTIAL. Cindy, Library Teacher
http://kissthebook.blogspot.com/2016/...

Ms. Arca says

Full disclaimer- I love road trip stories. This one is a sweet Walk Two Moons -esque road trip story by the same author as I Kill the Mockingbird. It’s about a boy and his family as they get to know one another better in those ways that we often forget to in our otherwise daily lives (or try to hide/ pains we push away). I’m especially excited to rec this less stereotypically ‘actiony’ book to some of my boys. I appreciated the grappling with loss, morbidity, and the many layers in which characters were trying to sort out how to look back and still move forward. I guess my one push was that I wanted to know the characters better (the snippets we caught of each were wonderful), but I wanted more. I did find the bits of humor so fun, and I could see this being a sweet read aloud with some good all-class giggles.

Mostly, I really loved Honey - I have to be honest I thought this was going to be a “ Im in ‘regular’ white people land type book”, and wasn’t expecting a Filipina — especially such a rad one. I love her. I have to say I wish the author had committed to the Lesbian arc I was hoping for, but alas, I’ll just interpret it as so for now (but next time, Mr. Acampora, please make it explicit !!?).

Definitely worth checking out.. the more I think about it the more I appreciate the small things he did.. especially in such a short book.

Donalyn says

This would make a fantastic read aloud for middle school! Funny and poignant.

Alyssa says

There are SO many things I loved about this book. I love the concept--that a young boy, his grieving but feisty grandma, his cool older cousin, and an elderly golden retriever are going on a roadtrip to visit dinosaurs in their late grandfather's memory. Sold! I can't wait to buy this book for my library because I think my students will enjoy it, especially those who enjoy books on the shorter side.

That being said, from my own perspective I wanted this book to have a little more substance. I felt the emotional resolution between Leo and his mom was rushed and not fleshed out enough. I also was completely heartbroken that Kermit is never mentioned--not once--after being laid to rest in the mountains. Anyone who knows me, knows that the dog is the most important character in any story.

Finally, I am left wishing that Abbey and Honey could have their own YA series where they fall in love and hunt for dinosaur bones and fly airplanes and be awesome. Someone please write me that book!

Jeff Raymond says

I appreciate middle grade books that take some chances. This book, however, maybe took a few too many wrong turns along the way.

The story is mostly a road trip tale, where Leo, a caretaker for his afflicted grandmother, has to go with her on her latest fling many states away. He gets on board with his cousin and they effectively drive cross country with a dog and figure out exactly what Gram needs and keep her safe along the way.

It's a strange read in some regards, but I had some personal issues with the fact that the grandmother clearly has dementia or Alzheimer's and it's played less for the conflict and more for laughs. The story itself isn't the most realistic thing, but we know that going in, and while this adult reader was ultimately unhappy with the payoffs, I'm not sure kids will notice enough compared to a lot of the other things the story has going for it.

It didn't work for me, but it might work for other kids. Worth keeping on your radar, but there are a lot of better options available.

Liz Friend says

The story: Leo's job is keeping an eye on his grandmother, who tends to wander off. So when she jumps in her old Buick and heads off to see the dinosaurs in Utah, Leo HAS to go with her. Right!?!? Here's a funny story about growing up, getting old, and getting there.

June Cleaver's ratings: Language G; Violence G; Sexual content G; Nudity G; Substance abuse G; Magic & the occult G; GLBT content G; adult themes (death of a family member, dementia) PG; overall rating PG.

Liz's comments: I really liked this one! Acampora's style is a lot like Richard Peck's, and his treatment of family problems and strengths is reminiscent too. Hand this to a kid looking for an easy read, and he/she will

end up with even more than they bargained for.

Jaina Rose says

This review is also available on my blog, Read Till Dawn.

Honestly, my gut reaction when closing the book was "man, this needed to be longer!"At barely 200 pages, there didn't seem to be much room for the story to stretch as long as it needed to go. I did really like the characters and the path that they took, but I was also yearning for more.

If I'm being completely honest, actuall, I did have a little trouble with some of the characters: namely, Leo's mother and grandmother. Mainly his mother. She's not actually around for most of the book, so it's hard to get a pin on her personality, but from the little we do get she seems like a rather unpleasant mother. I get that there were reasons for her behavior, that her life hasn't been all roses and sunshine, but she's been very closed-off and hasn't mentioned any of the major parts of her life to Leo (even the parts that include his own birth father). Leo, for his part, seems remarkably nonchalant about all the information she's hidden from him–but grows increasingly curious to find out more as the book progresses. It's a bit peculiar, really, that he hadn't wondered much before about what his gone-away dad was like.

Anyway, I'm not always the biggest fan of quirky stories: sometimes they just feel forced, like someone is trying to hard to be "meaningful" by being bizarre. I think Acampora legitimately knows how to pull off a touching and off-beat story, as he did in his debut Defining Dulcie (my review) all the way back in '06. It definitely works in How to Avoid Extinction as well, though I have to admit Extinction didn't quite connect with me on the emotional level that Dulcie did.

This is a meaningful and interesting book, full of interesting and colorful characters facing up to some pretty tough truths about life. I will admit freely that there was one scene about three-fourths in that made me sob like a baby, and I definitely came out of the book wishing it hadn't ended. I get the general vibe from the book, though, that it could have gone a little deeper. The material felt a little rushed at times, because (as I said at the beginning of this review) it honestly just felt too short. Maybe it's just a shortcoming inherent in the middle-grade genre, but I can't help but bemoan all of the amazing things Acampora could have done with the plot if he'd only taken another hundred pages to write it.

Disclaimer: I received a complimentary ARC of this novel from the publisher in exchange for my honest review.

Josh Newhouse says

Another fantastic read... A coming of age, cross generational road trip... I would have liked a little more resolution with the grandmother... She was at times a little flat bit o enjoyed book.

Gordon Korman would make an angry observation about one element...