



Avi Cantor Has Six Months to Live

Sacha Lamb

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Avi comes across these foreboding words scrawled on the bathroom mirror, but what do they mean? Is this a curse, a prediction, or a threat from Avi's emboldened bullies? And how do they know his real name when he hasn't even told his mother yet?

Then there is Ian—the cool new guy at school, who is suddenly paying attention to Avi. Ian is just like Avi, but he is also all sunshine, optimism, and magic. All the things that Avi doesn't know how to deal with...yet.

A romantic, #ownvoices fairy tale for trans boys.

Avi Cantor Has Six Months to Live Details

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From Reader Review Avi Cantor Has Six Months to Live for online ebook

ay?e says

4 stars!

“It’s better to make life out of life, right?”

I knew nothing about this story before I read it, two friends mentioned it to me, so I thought it was about time I read it, and I'm so glad I did.

Avi is a high school student who one day finds the words "Avi Cantor Has Six Months to Live" written in the school bathroom. It could be more pointless cruel bullying he receives, or it could be a warning. The message also brings the kind and beautiful Ian into his life. It's as it describes: "A romantic, #ownvoices fairy tale for trans boys."

This really is such a kind and wonderful story, the plot is amazing, the voice is strong and makes you care so much for these boys, and it's a short and sweet read. I totally fell in love with Avi and along with him too, his story is really special, and I loved to see him grow, gain agency and feel self-worth.

It's really hard to 1) find LGBT books that can just be a nice read (often they deal with darker themes/get explicit - which is fine and we need those stories too, I would just like as much diversity as het books get) 2) a LGBT story that features a trans lead !!! - So I'm really glad this story exists, and you should 100% read it! I don't want to say too much about the story (I think it's even better going in expecting nothing cause it will definitely pleasantly surprise you) but it's good, believe me.

Recommended for: anyone looking for a short and GOOD read, especially if you want good LGBT (with the main focus on trans) representation.

Dov Zeller says

Something about this book. The tensions between controlled and careful prose and storytelling and absolute conversational ease--and a poetry that comes not from one or the other, but from the places they meet and the places they wrestle. I couldn't put *Avi Cantor* down and though it hurt a bit too much in moments, because of all the emotional intelligence, and a touch of cruelty between people who care for each other, the vivid portrayal of a relationship in which there is a great need for treading carefully, with Ian trying to find ways to connect with Avi in and through and around brokenness. All of the ways we push each other away to protect ourselves...There was a lot of emotional pain in here I could relate to, more than I was exactly comfortable with, and yet I'm so glad I found this book and grateful to have read it. I laughed, I cheered, I worried. I wondered.

Other considerable tensions: between sweetness and intimacy and bitterness and/or prickliness; between self care and care for others...

What if, taking care of ourselves means hurting others? What if someone else's desire to take care of us feels puzzling and dangerous, because it's unfamiliar, and because it is an invitation to a kind of intimacy that feels terrifying, or because sometimes taking care of someone else is an act of seeing and deep compassionate connection, and at other times, it's a way of looking past or through, a form of objectification or condescension or belittlement. So how do we parse all the new signals we're getting, particularly given that all information is filtered through synapses that have already been firing in very specific patterns for a good long time. (How do we shift patterns that have become, to a degree, ingrained?) And what if the borders of everything aren't exactly clear? Particularly when we enter into new social and emotional territory.

This book explores all these questions and it's magnificent in all that says and all that it leaves to the reader and to the characters' private lives. It is equally compelling in its focus and its unfocus. It's a love story, a fairy tale, a tale of magic, but in a way, it's about the magic we hold within ourselves... Queer magic in Jewish time.

Here are some quotes that I love. This is Avi's first person narration:

They [Ian's family] just act like it's normal, like a boy can be any old shape he wants and all they see when they look at him is the boy that he is.

[Ian] looks at me. His eyes are deep, deep, deep. Why did I think he was so easy to read, the first time I met him?

I wonder if they talk about how their son picked me up out of nowhere, and now I'm here all the time. I wonder if they ask each other what my home life is like, why I never have to call a parent to ask for permission for anything, ever. I wonder if when they keep refilling my plate without asking, it's on purpose. I wonder if they want to adopt me, add me to their collection of mismatched children.

Apparently nothing I do is a problem for them. I'm not sure I like it. It makes me feel unsettled, like I don't quite know what shape I am anymore.

There's an extra month in the Hebrew calendar this year, and the High Holy Days don't come until October, and it's cold. Ian asks me about Rosh Hashanah, the week before. Do you have plans? I never talk about my family. I can tell from the way he looks at me that he's worried he isn't allowed to ask.

It's magic, their house. The way they're all obsessed. Rosa with her cooking. Alice and Gabriella with their music, Gabriella's plants and frogs.

I sleep with my head on his shoulder and I dream that I'm on a soft, green planet where no one exists who can hurt me.

The thing about a crossroads. It's just an intersection, that's what we call it now. I go to the one by the cafe, where Ian always takes me for cider. At the middle of that intersection, at the crossroads, there's a tiny island of withered grass and a bench where no one ever sits, because who wants to sit in the middle of traffic? I sit there now and light my candle, hunching over to protect it from the wind. Wax drips onto my fingers and snow collects in my hair, on my shoes, on the road around me. There's not much traffic, because of the snow, and everything sounds hushed. I don't have a real winter coat, and I'm shivering. I sit and stare at the candle and it occurs to me that I don't know if there are words one is supposed to say to summon a demon. Ian's instructions have gone out of my head. If I try to picture the file he sent me, all I see is the look on his face when I told him we're not the same.

He acts all confident, but he still has secrets. Parts of himself he feels he has to shut away. As if the ease with which he passes makes it harder for him to break trivial boundaries.

“Huh?” he says. “What?” He blinks at me, owlish, behind the glasses he almost never wears. I have a strange urge to lean over, take them off him, and poke out his eyeballs so he can never look at me with that expression of baffled concern again.

We sit side-by-side on Ian’s bed, legs under the covers, watching cartoons. He’s taken off his wholesome costume and he’s wearing a Tinkerbell tank top and no binder, out of gender-conforming camouflage. We forgot to ask Lilit about magic top surgery.

From the afterward by the author: The emotional atmosphere of the story hinges on the ideas of cold/warmth, loneliness/togetherness, fear/safety and touch starvation/affection, the contrast between, and eventual coming together of, Ian’s warm, comfortable world and Avi’s cold, isolated one.

Kuzu says

I wrote this and I think it's pretty good!! Maybe you will like it too!! ???✿???

Skye Kilaen says

A dark but ultimately hopeful YA novella about suicidal gay trans Jewish boy Avi and how his life changes when he meets sunny, optimistic gay trans classmate Ian. Avi is deeply unhappy, prickly, often cruel as a way to protect himself, but he also desperately needs the completely different world Ian offers him access to, with warmth and family acceptance and love. Not a spoiler: having these things offered to you doesn't mean you can immediately reach out and take them. Loved the magical (and other) realism, definitely looking forward to reading more of Lamb's work in the future.

Nina ✽ Looseleaf Reviews ✽ says

How was such a short story such a trip? Cause let me tell you, in 70 pages, I had *feelings*.

Avi Cantor is a quasi-magical story of a high-schooler mid-transition. While he has told no one his name--Avi--the words, "Avi Cantor has six months to live" appear on the bathroom mirror at school. What Avi assumes is an uncanny new bullying technique turns out to be a lot more complicated.

Without spoiling this beautiful story, let me tell you, that summary, while accurate, is not what the story is *about*. It's not about bullying; it's about self-loathing. It's not about avoiding death; it's about facing life.

I'm hesitant to call this magical realism, but it has a beautifully surreal and sardonic prose that fans of The Raven Boys--or even Marquez--would love. And I'll be damned if this isn't one of the most poignant books about depression that I've ever read!

P.S. If there is a movie/tv adaptation and Ian Alexander isn't Ian, I will consider the world ROBBED.

Read this review at:

Lindsay says

"Avi Cantor Has Six Months to Live": words written on a bathroom mirror using a name no-one is supposed to know. Avi hasn't come out yet and is still living his life as April, but people seem to know the message is about him. Depressed, a bit strange and a loner with problems at home, it's easy to believe. But then Avi meets Ian, another trans teenager and his wonderful and magical family. But despite the brightness that he brings into Avi's life there's still a countdown.

Two trans boys falling in love with diverse and loving families as well as an element of the supernatural all makes for a wonderful YA story that makes the most of its premise and its fantastic elements. A short and wonderful read.

Em says

This was such a lovely surprise. The Jewish rep, the trans rep, the depression rep in general was so delicious and enchanting. This has magic tied up with transgender identity mixed with family and belonging and makes you crave so many hugs. Just. The best thing I've read recently with any trans rep. Also it has a really cute (if a bit messy) mlm romance.

sarah y says

i read the first three paragraphs of this and IMMEDIATELY texted it to everyone that i know. if i were to give this an endorsement i would say it's mandatory reading! for everybody! so so good.

Shira Glassman says

Trans author Sacha Lamb shows us a love story between two trans teenage boys, with elements of magical realism. The main character is Jewish, depressed, and not out to school or mom yet, and speaks to us through a series of highly relatable confessions that feel like he's snuck inside your head and saying what you'd say if you were in his place. I'll let Avi's narrative voice provide their own testimony to the prose's strength:

(This paragraph made my heart do somersaults through so many emotions)

Looks just brown enough that you're not sure where he's from. Skips school for weird holidays even though his mom has to work all the time, so he just sits in his room, alone, and eats frozen food from the kosher section. Dresses like a boy, which is a problem, because none of us have any imagination.

The first moment when he meets the other boy, he catastrophizes and it's so relatable; it's pretty literally how I spent my morning yesterday, in fact.

Of boyfriend's family, composed of a cis mom, a trans mom, and a sister who plays violin (hurray!):
They just act like it's normal, like a boy can be any old shape he wants and all they see when they look at him is the boy that he is.

Another line about the boyfriend's family that felt totally relatable to me in my darker moods:
Apparently nothing I do is a problem for them. I'm not sure I like it. It makes me feel unsettled, like I don't quite know what shape I am anymore.

(Caveat that I do like being treated kindly by brand new friends; I can just relate to the "unsettled" feeling! I think it might come from a fear that we're not adequately reciprocating the kindness since it can be hard to reach out from inside depression. But that's up to Lamb, in this case.)

Another well-phrased line:

They don't mind me staying in his room, even. In his bed. I don't know what to think of the idea that they're ok with all the things we aren't actually doing.

This line gave me so many cultural feelings, and also made me feel warm and squishy inside because it's so validating for parents to cooperate with our queer identities:

My mom texts me in the middle of the night. *I like that you chose your grandfather's name.*

And this line, for the same reason (tw: deadname at the end)

"Avraham," mom says, behind me, as if she's been saying it that way my entire life. The same tired tone she used to use for April.

I did get a little confused with the more magical-realismy elements, but that's because it's not a genre in which I'm terribly fluent. The likeability of the characters and their setup pretty much made up for that so even if magical realism confuses you, too, there's room for you here.

The references to Judaism and Jewishness were soothing and not presented in opposition to anyone's queerness, which as someone who looks to our traditions for comfort, I found soothing. (This is not to contradict those who have negative experiences; I'm just speaking for myself.)

FYI, this story does have deadnaming and misgendering, from characters the MC isn't out to yet, but the author is trans and trans people are allowed to write their own experiences. I'm including this warning for two reasons: first, to give trans readers a heads up, and secondly so cis readers who are also writers understand that just because Lamb did it doesn't mean *we* should. Additional TW for suicidal ideation.

Justine says

A wonderful story about two trans boys falling in love. I loved the way the story touched on the emotional processes of recovery from depression, of finding and feeling worthy of love and life, and the myriad emotional complexities of transition. The added fantastical element was a lovely touch.

Deftly written with an endearing humour, this is a gem of a read.

“Neither of my moms are technically witches,” he says, primly. “We are just a highly intuitive family. With, uh, an especially fine-tuned sense of impending doom.”

“Mine too,” I tell him. “It’s called being Jewish. Doesn’t make me magic.”

Dahlia says

The magic in this one is not my personal thing, but I loved the writing so, so much and immediately tweeted at the author to make sure he has more trans boy YA coming, because lord knows we need it and I think his voice is just A+.

Laura says

This lovely short story is free here. I'd highly recommend giving it a read

TheBookSmugglers says

The latest - and final - novelette in our Gods and Monsters season. This is Gay YA, about a Jewish trans boy who is struggling with depression and bullying, finding acceptance and love with another trans boy - it features awesome lesbian moms, a super great friendly demon, hilarious kisses and a happy ending.

Goodreads reviewers who want a review copy, send me a message!

anna (readingpeaches) says

this was so sweet & soft & quite possibly introduced the gayest family i have ever known

Xan West says

The publisher gave me a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

I loved this so much. I don't know how its possible that a book centering a trans boy getting bullied & feeling suicidal can actually feel appropriately light and warm & hopeful but this book totally manages it. There are so many good people on Avi's side, caring about him and wanting him to survive and seeing him for who he is, throughout the story, that even with the difficult content, it still felt so hopeful and warm to read. It doesn't minimize or handwave the bullying or suicidality away, it just...balances them. With this beautifully precise touch.

The writing is gorgeous and feels so deliberate and careful. I felt safe in it, even with this story that cuts so close to the bone for me.

I loved that Avi was surrounded by queer & trans characters, that Lilit was on his side too, that his boyfriend got to be fully himself and in his femmeness at home. I adored how deeply Jewish this story was; it was definitely part of what made it feel like I was wrapping myself in a cozy blanket.

As a Jewish trans reader, it means so much to me to have this story. It's the first contemporary story I have read with a Jewish trans MC, and it resonated so deeply, in so many ways.

I would gladly read a lot more about these characters, but this story worked for me at the length it was. It felt very much like it was written for trans readers, and for Jewish readers. It was for us first, and didn't cater to folks who wanted more explanation or more time in certain beats of the story because that's what they are used to getting. For example, many trans MG & YA stories would center Avi's coming out to his mom, give that moment in the story a lot of space & room & angst. This story held that experience in a way that really worked for me as a trans reader: one that focused on moments of choice and acceptance and care and love, without also making it a huge deal or even the biggest thing Avi is grappling with. This isn't a coming out as trans story, it's a story that includes Avi coming out, that's about other things. I loved that.

I struggled a bit with Avi getting outed, the origins of the intensification of him getting bullied. It was a hard moment in the story for me, as a reader. I hurt for Avi so much. In the end, I think it worked, and makes sense, and feels so real that it would unfold this way, that of course attempts to help go awry and this character is flawed and imperfect. The other aspects of the character felt more real, because of the flaws that are uncovered. So I do really think it worked and made the story better. Avi gets outed but it doesn't really get understood by the folks at school; that aspect felt so real and painful and complicated, like this encapsulation of the complexities of trans life.

The trans rep is wonderful. It is deeply real, resonated so much for me, has all these lovely details and references, and feels like it was written for trans readers. I especially liked the moment where one of the boys warns the other about the risks of sleeping in his binder, and *he does it anyway*. That felt so right to me. Yes, let young trans readers know it's not safe but also...let him be a boy who is reckless in that way, too. I loved the (view spoiler) I loved that one of the adults was also trans and the reader finds this out with no fanfare.

I highly recommend this novelette; it's beautiful and heartwrenching and hopeful and cozy and gave me so many feels. The romance is sweet and lovely. I am so glad I got to read it, and that it is out in the world. This story is a lovely ex of how it's v possible to tell stories abt hard aspects of being a trans kid that aren't bleak & full of despair. For that reason alone it is so deeply necessary.

Trigger Warnings (view spoiler)
