

BY THE #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF DEAR MARTIN

NIC STONE

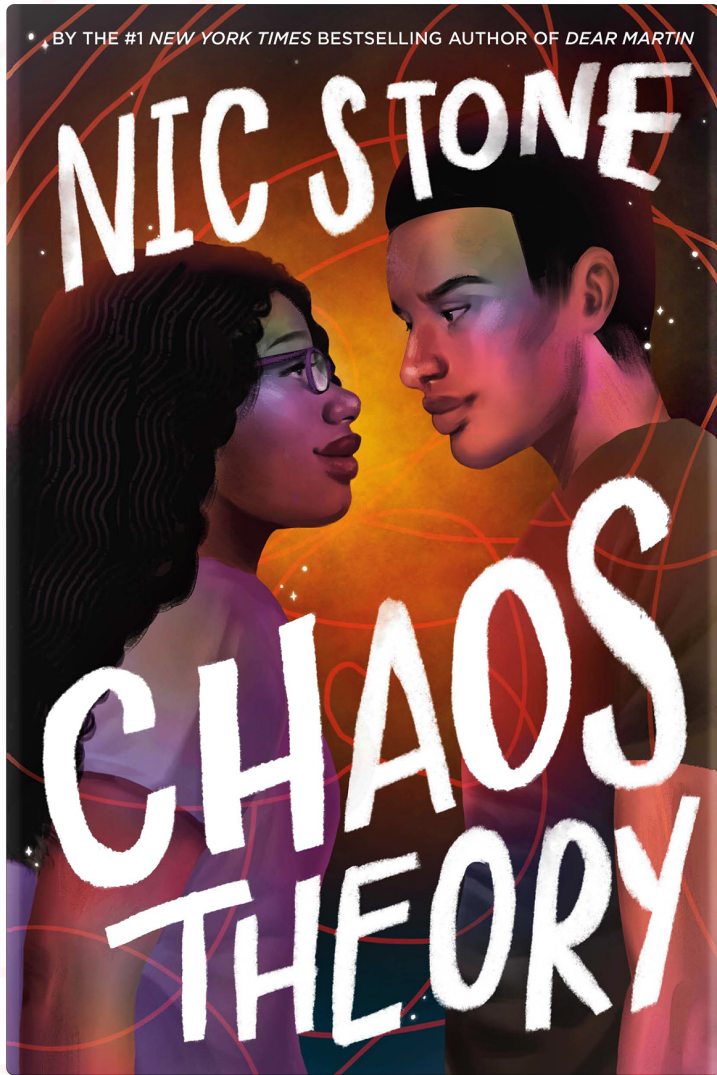
CHAOS
THEORY

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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ABOUT THE BOOK

DETACHED

Since Shelbi enrolled at Windward Academy as a senior and won't be there very long, she hasn't bothered making friends. What her classmates don't know about her can't be used to hurt her—you know, like at her last school.

WASTED

Andy Criddle is not okay. At all. He's had far too much to drink. Again. Which is bad. And things are about to get worse.

When Shelbi sees Andy at his lowest, she can relate. So she doesn't resist reaching out. And there's no doubt their connection has them both seeing stars . . . but the closer they get, the more the past threatens to pull their universes apart.

From #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Nic Stone comes a tour de force about living with grief, prioritizing mental health, and finding love amid the chaos.

THEMES: Cultural Diversity, Coming of Age, Friendship, Humor, Racism & Prejudice, Black History

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

NIC STONE was born and raised in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. After graduating from Spelman College, she worked extensively in teen mentoring and lived in Israel for a few years before returning to the US to write full-time. You can learn more on her website: nicstone.info.



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PRE-READING QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

Read the introductory letter from the author before starting this story. Who is the intended audience of this story? What does Nic Stone mean when she says the book is *to* and *for* different people?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the start of the story, there is a text message conversation. How do you feel after reading this conversation? What have you learned about these two characters?
2. In what way does Andy break his promise to his texting partner, who readers later learn is Shelbi?
3. How did Andy and Shelbi finally connect in person?
4. Read the following passages from *Chaos Theory*. Reflect on each passage's significance.

“Hey,” he says. And he holds up his phone.

“Thank you.”

“What on earth are you thanking me for this time, Walter?”

He thinks on it for a second, then looks Shelbi right in the eye. “For judgment-free safety,” he says. And then he closes the car door. (p. 41)

“Just hush and listen,” Shelbi says. “So sometimes two separate stars will orbit a common center of mass, which binds them together by gravitational forces. If they’re close enough, they can exchange stellar materials. It’s

called a binary star stem. And I just feel like Walter and I have something like that going on.” (p. 63)

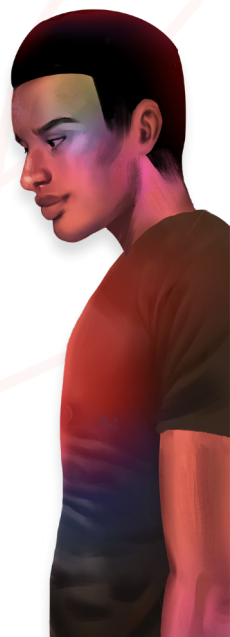
“But I just like . . . man, I wish more people would take the time to consider what it might be like to live with a brain that works like mine. To have your own mind tell you you’re not worth the air you breathe. Do you have any idea what it’s like to feel like you’re the queen of the universe one minute, and a waste of molecules the next?” (p. 101)

“People aren’t put on this earth to meet your expectation.” (p. 159)

“His old sensei’s voice pops into his head: Scars exist to remind us of what we’ve survived. Shelbi has apparently survived quite a bit.” (p. 87–88)

“Real love wants the best for the other person, even if it isn’t you,” Dad continues. “If there’s something you feel you need to say to her, do so in a way that doesn’t violate any boundaries she’s put in place. Then let her be.” (p. 173)

5. What was Andy’s punishment for being arrested for driving under the influence?
6. Describe Andy’s parents. For what office is his mother running? What are the five ideological stances that drive her campaign? (p. 61) Does her family hold these same beliefs?
7. Why does Shelbi call Andy Walter? How does she feel when someone else calls him that name? Why does she feel this way? What does it say about their relationship?
8. Andy shares with Shelbi that his mother “doesn’t really believe in that sort of thing” when discussing therapy. (p. 64) Why is there stigma about therapy?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Describe the relationship between Shelbi and her relatives (her parents, grandmother, and cousin).
- Shelbi presents Walter with a friendship contract. Why does she do this? What information did she share about the way her brain works? Do Shelbi and Andy adhere to all the rules in the contract?
- Reread the chapter “Agreement.” (pp. 81–91) What revelations do Andy and Shelbi share? What was the mood and tone of this chapter? What would a visual representation of this chapter look like?
- Shelbi moved away from California because of trauma. Her friend, for whom she began to have romantic feelings, overwhelmed and tormented Shelbi with mean text messages. Shelbi subsequently hurt herself. Why is it significant that Shelbi shares this history with Andy?
- After a drunken night and being picked up by Shelbi and her driver, Andy wakes up at Shelbi’s grandmother Bibi’s home. Bibi says to him while eating, “But don’t fret, young man. Your beloved and I will take excellent care of you. . . . You have such a beautiful soul, Walter.” (p. 166) Why does he have such an emotional reaction to her words?
- What happened to Andy’s sister? How did she die? Why does Andy feel guilty?
- Andy catches his mother in a compromising situation with his ex-girlfriend’s father Mr. Locke. Why was Andy mad at Mr. Locke? How are their lives intertwined both professionally and personally?
- Andy is addicted to alcohol. Why does he turn to alcohol? At the end of story, who goes with him to seek help for his addiction?
- What is the theme of this novel? Explain your thinking.

DISRUPTING THE STIGMA OF GOING TO THERAPY

Within both Andy’s and Shelbi’s families, therapy is viewed negatively. Andy’s mother “doesn’t believe in the sort of thing.” (p. 64) Shelbi’s mother’s mother, according to Shelbi, “is one of those women who swears mental illness only happens to white people, and prayer is the only ‘medicine’ anyone needs.” (p. 88) Why do you think this is? Research evolving views on therapy, particularly in communities of color. Use this article as starting point:

“Why mental health care is stigmatized in Black communities.” White, R. (2019). USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work. Retrieved from dworakpeck.usc.edu/news/why-mental-health-care-stigmatized-black-communities

THE DANGER OF TOXIC TEXTING

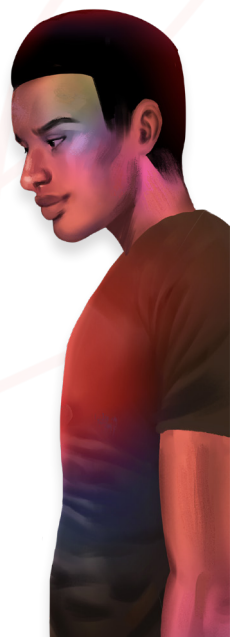
Research Michelle Carter and how she terrorized her boyfriend Conrad Roy II through text messages. How are these events similar to what happened to Shelbi when she lived in California? Discuss virtual bullying. What would you do if you were in a similar situation? Who could you ask for help?

MUSICAL INSPIRATIONS

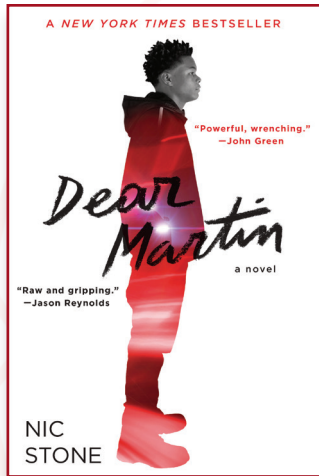
Chaos Theory has energy strumming through it. Even in its quiet moments, that energy moves the story along. With that in mind, what would this book sound like? Create a soundtrack or playlist for this book. Explain your thinking about the inclusion of each song.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATIONS

Create a visual representation of Shelbi and Andy’s relationship. Include an artist’s statement describing and explaining each element.

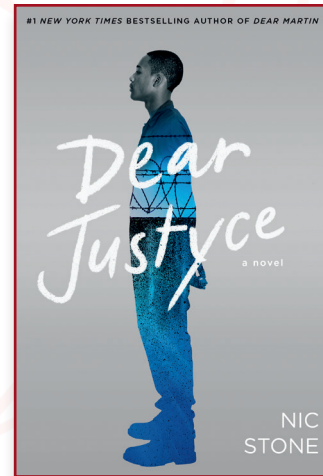


ALSO BY NIC STONE



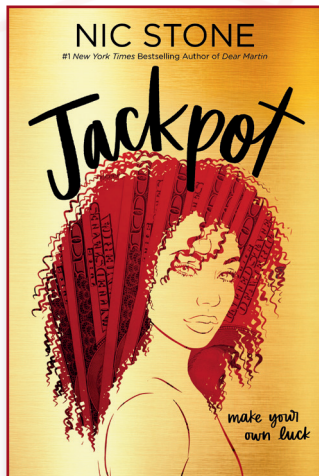
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This guide was written by Dr. Shanetia P. Clark, who teaches courses in children's and young adult literature at Salisbury University.