



Book Gang Podcast Transcript: **Nicola Yoon Discusses Her Provocative Debut (One of Our Kind)**

Nicola Yoon (00:00)

Hi, I'm Nicola Yoon and I'm here for my debut adult novel. It's called One of Our Kind.

Amy Clark (00:15.278)

Writing inspiration can sometimes strike in the most unlikely places. And that's exactly what happened for today's guest. Podcast listening in the shower electrified a story Nicola Yoon had never expected to write.

It feels a little silly introducing Nicola Yoon because she's such a renowned, bestselling young adult writer. But today's conversation is about her brand new, provocative debut for adults called One of Our Kind.

Now, if social horror is a new subgenre of literature for you as a reader,

I do want to explain some elements that are important markers for a book like this. Unlike typical horror novels, social horror can combine supernatural elements with real-world issues, giving us a chilling glimpse into the fears and anxieties that haunt our collective consciousness. These books don't just scare us with fictional monsters. These novels offer readers glimpses into the genuine everyday realities of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression that sinisterly lurk in the shadows of our society. But I want to be honest that many books with these kinds of themes offer endings that can sometimes feel unsatisfying. In social horror, the villain can be the systemic injustices that are ingrained in our world. Those kinds of issues, those issues, they can't be defeated with a silver bullet or a stake through the heart, just like what's happening in our world right now.

Our society is deeply unsettling. There are no easy answers. There is no catharsis. But books like these, they encourage readers to confront those uncomfortable truths, often in the safety and context of warm reading communities. I know that when we picked books like this for our book club, like [When No One Is Watching](#) or [The Warehouse](#), those are two examples that come immediately to mind. It's been incredible for thought-provoking conversations that have sometimes changed my own mind about the world and the people in it. So I wanted to offer a starter pack for readers with some of the most impactful books that I've read or conversations I've hosted as a book club host. I've put those together in a bonus book list with 23 social horror novels for your summer. Now this will not be the only episode that you're gonna get with Nicola. Patrons can dive into the ending of this book, which I think is the most important part of the story, in today's spoiler chat. That's where we're going to discuss the motivations behind her characters, this book's ending, and the emotional connection that she is hoping readers will make as they finish that final page. If you're new here, hi, I'm Amy Allen Clark, and I'm the voice behind the Book Gang podcast. This podcast celebrates debuts, backlist books, and under-the-radar book gems.

I want to say thank you to everyone who's been so generous and purchased a copy of this year's Summer Reading Guide. I had screened 80 books for your summer and offered 35 of my top picks. That includes Nicola's book. You can grab a copy for \$7 to help our show stay on air, but I do want to also acknowledge the MVPs of the whole hour. All of these conversations are made

possible through our Patreon community who offer continuous support. I value every single person and I just want to say thank you for doing that because I know that money is tight for many people and it means something to me that you choose this space to invest in. If you join you will not only get access to our book club and this year's summer reading guide but you can also download a 52 page fully booked newsletter that's filled with some of the spillover reviews on books that did not make the guide, some backlist books that I just discovered, and cheat sheets for your next Bookstore Day that is created in collaboration with Get Booked with Larry.

Now let's meet this month's guest.

Nicola Yoon is the number one New York Times bestselling author of *Instructions for Dancing*, *Everything, Everything*, *The Sun is Also a Star*, and co-author of *Blackout* and *Whiteout*. She is a National Book Award finalist, a Michael L. Prince Honor Book recipient, a Coretta Scott King New Talent Award winner, and the first black woman to hit number one on the New York Times Young Adult Best Seller list. Two of her novels have been made into major motion pictures. She grew up in Jamaica and Brooklyn and lives in Los Angeles with her husband, the novelist David Yoon and their daughter. [One of Our Kind](#) is Yoon's adult debut that hits store shelves on June 11th. Remember if you love this show, a free way to support my work, is just to leave a really nice written review on iTunes. It lets people know that this is a great space to hang out. So I appreciate that. Now let's get chatting.

Amy Allen Clark (05:11)

Well, before we get started in talking about this book, because this is a pretty dishy book to be talking about for our summer, I wanted to acquaint readers with your imprint that you have with your husband, David, because I feel like this is a good way to introduce them to something maybe they don't know exists in the world. Can you tell me a little bit about Joy Revolution books?

Nicola Yoon (05:35)

I would love to. It's like one of my favorite things to talk about. So yeah, so my husband and I, David, we have an imprint at Random House Children's Books. It's called Joy Revolution, and it's a love story imprint. So it's love stories written by people of color and starring people of color. You know, it's big, spoony love and

kisses, like transformative love, first love. And we started it.

You know, it's something that David and I have been talking about since we met in graduate school 500 years ago. And hopefully finally when we got some success in publishing, we were finally able to, you know, pitch it. We pitched it to Barbara Marcus, who runs Random House Children's Books. And she has been just this great mentor to me over the years. And she agreed; thought it was a really great idea.

And the reason we wanted to do it is because we are both romantic goobers. Like David and I love love stories. And it's like one of the first things we bonded over when we first met. And we always said, how come like all like the people of color were always like the sassy side character or like David likes to say like the Asian guy is always like the lab tech, you know, like he's the one that's telling you, you're pregnant. It's a boy or whatever. The black girl is always sassy, but she's always on the side, right? It's never her falling in love or you know, getting the boy or girl or being vulnerable and smart and all of those things. Even though we were falling in love and we knew that people of color fell in love all the time, every day, like every day in high school I was in love with someone new. So we really just want to present this, you know, other part of the world because I think sometimes when you talk about stories with people of color, they're always sort of very heavy and they're issue oriented.

And while I do think that we need those books, we absolutely do need those books because we still live in America, a country that is striving to be better, but we're still striving, right? We also need the other stories, right? The stories that are just happy and swoony and something you can relax into. And the thing I always say is that it gives people of color the full measure of their humanity because it's not just all struggle, right? It's just one part of it and it's not all of it. And I think we never see this other part. And so David, I really wanted to do that.

Amy (07:52)

Well, that is a wonderful resource for people. I know as a book club leader, I am looking for stories of black joy too. I think it's really a struggle because those issues that we talk about in America are really important for us to explore as book clubs. But we also need those stories that are going to give us hope and happiness as well. And so this is a wonderful resource for me as a book club

leader. Are you involved then in selection for the books? How does that work?

Nicola (08:20)

Yeah. So basically David and I do not sleep. So we get submissions just all the time. And then we have acquisition meetings on Fridays with our editor, Bria Raggan, who works at Random House Children's Books for the Joy Revolution imprint.

And so every Friday we get on the phone for just hours and hours and we'll discuss the submissions that we've got and choose which ones we want to try to acquire, right? Sometimes, you know, right away you want to acquire it. Sometimes you read something and you go, you know, if this were just a little bit different, and then we'll ask for like a revise and resubmit. And we've gotten some really wonderful books that way, like people who will go back and then take the notes and might really come up with something beautiful. But yeah, I mean, we read, we edit, we write editorial letters.

We're involved with design, like we get in the form of the designers and you know, we pitch our ideas and we go through rounds. Like so we do the whole thing. So when I say we don't sleep, I am not kidding. We sleep very little.

Amy (09:22)

Oh my goodness. Well, I don't know how you're doing that and writing books because you're both out there like doing these books. I will say, because we're going to talk about this book today, I remember watching you, I believe it was on the CBS Morning Show. You were out in promotion for a movie and they asked you like, are you going to keep doing this? And you said something and I'm totally not quoting you directly, but it was one of those things where you're like, they won't even know what's coming next. Right. You had maybe just submitted this into that, that like two year literary agent and your team and everything. And I told my husband when we were watching it, I was like, man, I can't wait to read this because she's clearly brewing something. I want to hear a little bit about what this book is about for readers and more about why you wanted to explore this in your story.

Nicola (10:17)

Yeah, you know, it's funny. I don't actually remember that, but maybe I was like

anticipating that it's such a different story for me because I think mostly I'm known for the young adult romances. And this is decidedly not a romance or young adults, right? So the book is called One of Our Kind, as we've said, and it's about a woman named Jasmine who, along with her husband and her young son, moved to this town. It's a suburb outside of Los Angeles. It's called Liberty, and it builds itself as a Black Utopia. And so Jasmine moves there with her husband and her son, and she's expecting safety. She's expecting community. But what she finds is most of the people in Liberty are more interested in going to like the wellness center at the top of the hill.

She does find some like-minded people and they start to investigate what's happening in Liberty and it gets a little bit dangerous, I will say. And she has to try to figure out who really is one of her kind. So that's like the big sort of elevator pitch. My publisher has been talking about it as *Get Out* meets the *Stepford Wives*, which I actually think is an accurate description.

Amy (11:30)

Yeah, I told you, I didn't know how necessarily to set people up for this book, because so much really happens towards the end that really is pivotal. But the book itself is so tense. Like I was sitting there, I feel like my whole body was kind of locked up through this entire story, because you are building so much tension for the reader. And I don't know what that would be like to write that. How did you set this tone for your readers? Did you find it easy to create tension in your story?

Nicola (12:05)

Yeah, I mean, you know, it's funny because I've never written a thriller before, so I didn't know if I could do it. I certainly read them. I mean, I think what I did is I just leaned hard into everyone's desires, right? So every character in this book has something they really, really want, something that's important to them personally, philosophically too, because they do have a point of view on the world. And I just really leaned into that. I tried not to make any villains, right? Because a villain is just someone who believes in their own story, right? Like they don't know that they're doing the wrong thing.

And then I tried to be a little bit more spare than I am in the young adult books, right? That I definitely, not that I was withholding information, but people are

sometimes opaque to themselves and people believe what they want, right? Like, when they believe the things that they really want to, especially as adults, I think we tend to do this, we get put a little bit of a blinder on and you're just trying to make it through, you're just trying to muddle through the world. I think we all have this in common. And so I think the tension is because of such strong beliefs and such strong desires, right? So you like identify with everyone and you're just like, what's gonna happen? What's gonna happen? I mean, so I just made them really real.

Amy (13:24)

Yeah. What inspired this book?

Nicola (13:26)

You know, it's funny because this question, usually, I think most writers answer this question and they have some idea what inspires it, but some of it is just magic too. You're just like, what? I have no idea. It was there. So I do have some idea where this comes from, but some of it's, you know, just, it's just out there. It was inspired first by a conversation I had with a friend of mine who is a writer and an activist. And we'd done a panel on race and racism.

And then afterwards we went to dinner and we were having wine and probably too much wine. And at one point he asked me if I ever considered who I'd be as a person, who we'd all be as people if it weren't for the specter of race and racism. And it's one of those questions that it's such a big question and it's an interesting question and it's an impossible question, right? And it's one of those things I've been thinking about for years anyway. I like to say that, you know, it's hard to tease out who you would be if everything were different. So that's why the question is so impossible. Like fish imagining a world without water, right? It's just, what are you gonna do, you can't. So we talked about it for a little while and then we just drank more wine because honestly, it's too big a question. And then I have this like ridiculous thing.

There's this podcast I listen to all the time called, You're Wrong About. They've done an episode about the Stepford Wives and they were saying how most people misremember that book because they use like that stepford wife's term as a pejorative and they sort of bash women with it, you know, like, she's such a stepford wife. And, but the book is actually really feminist, right? The book is

about the men that would want to do this thing to these women. And so we kind of, the zeitgeist around that book is kind of wrong, which I didn't realize. Anyway, so I ended up reading it and just falling in love with the book and just be like, how do we not know this? And it's so fierce. And it's such a moral indictment of the man, like it's such a feminist book.

And then there's this Toni Morrison quote that's been in my head since I was a kid. when she says, the very real function of racism is distraction and it keeps you from doing your work and it keeps you having to prove over and over again, your reason for being. That's a paraphrase because she said it much, much prettier, nicer, much more eloquently. And so all of those things like smashed together in my head. It was the summer of 2020, George Floyd's murder had just happened. I was despairing, if I'm being honest, and angry. And they just smashed together in my head and I wrote it just all at once. Like the first draft took six weeks, which is a thing that's never happened before and will never happen again because I am the slowest writer on earth. And then three years more to revise. So six weeks to do the first draft, three years to make it an actual book. And that was it.

So that's the genesis of it, but also it's just alchemy, right?

Amy (16:24)

I felt the despair. I don't know if you want to hear that, but I did feel that in Jasmine especially, where she is getting so frustrated with the dialogue that's happening around her in the world and how people don't seem to care. And that's hard to hear. That's hard to see. And I think it's something that book clubs should be talking about. It's such a hard balance, right? Because I felt like with her character, I empathized with the fact that she wants to live a life, but also be part of conversation. You know, and that is such a hard balance. Did you relate to that aspect of her character, especially kind of separating herself from the community and in the ways that she had to, to kind of adapt into this new neighborhood where people are you know, almost like separating themselves from it.

Nicola (17:21)

Yeah, I mean, I think Jasmine feels a lot of guilt after she moves to Liberty, right? Because she's such an activist, right? And she's such a sort of fierce defender.

And she's a public defender, and she does her job really well, and she really cares. And she wants to make sure that she does not lose that aspect of herself. The fact that she is paying attention to people who are less fortunate.

I mean, there's a very big class aspect to this book, right? And the ways in which wealth can protect you and the ways in which it doesn't protect you depending on who you are. So Jasmine feels, I think her primary emotion is like feeling guilty that she has this protection now because her husband is now really quite wealthy, but also doing, you know, the roll up your sleeves work. And I think that that is her primary tension.

Amy (18:14)

Did you relate to that tension and do you feel that in yourself too?

Nicola (18:18)

Yeah, I mean, I think it's something that we all feel, right? Like the world is a mess, right? Like it's hard not to like turn on the television every day or get on the internet and not feel; you can always feel like you're not doing enough for whatever cause there is, right? I mean, just like climate change and there's a war and there are several wars, right? Going on at any time.

There's LGBTQIA issues. There's like politics and race and all of it. I mean, I think it's hard to feel like you're ever doing enough, no matter who you are, honestly.

Amy (18:54)

We have this like dynamic in our family where my husband is just exhausted. He's so consumed by everything that's happening. Like he's constantly taking it all in. And I have gotten to a point where I've kind of tuned out because I was like, my body can't sustain this level. And then I'm looking at my daughter, who is a Gen Zer, and she's kind of processing it in a completely different way. Like she's almost immune to it, not immune to it, but doesn't seem as alarmed. And so there's like this weird balance going on even in one family where we want to be active, we want to be; we want we care so much. But there also is an element where you can't sustain that, like your body, your body can't sustain this level of like heightened awareness all the time. You still have to kind of live a life. And I think that's something that you really illustrate in your story.

Nicola (19:48)

Yeah. I mean, I really wanted Jasmine to struggle with that, right? Because I think, again, I think it's something that we all struggle with, but what does it do to you when you're always in sort of fight or flight mode, right? Like if you, and you always feel like you have to do that.

Like where, when and where do you get to feel safe? Do you get to relax? What does relaxing even mean? Should you be able to? So Jasmine really struggles with these questions, which I think that we all sort of struggle with. I mean, we all have iPhones, right? But, you know, the history of making an iPhone isn't great, right? But we still have them. And I think to live in modern society is to live with a level of, it's not hypocrisy exactly, but we have to. You can't fix everything. And so there are things that you have to accept and they're really complicated feelings around that. And I don't think the book offers any answers, but I enjoyed asking the questions, you know, like I really wanted to explore because I think it's worth asking these questions. It's a place to begin.

Amy (20:50)

And the setting is so important to this, right? Her kind of being displaced a bit from her old stomping ground. And now she has this new place that she's trying to get the hang of.

What was the inspiration for maybe setting her apart into the space and how you wanted to craft that area of the neighborhood?

Nicola (21:09)

Right. So yeah, she's in Liberty, which I think the least expensive house in Liberty costs a million. And those are like your basic like shack, which is obviously ridiculous, right? But I really did want to put her into this place that was very wealthy. And I wanted to explore what level of protection that afforded her and also put her into contact with other very wealthy, very well accomplished black people that she expects to be like her, right? I really just wanted to play with what her expectations were of herself and of the neighborhood and the people she would meet. Because I think there are assumptions that we make about each other race-wise and class-wise, right? And so putting her into a utopia, a black utopia where everyone's wealthy and very accomplished and feeling safe is a way to ask those questions.

It was also just fun to make this town and put all this ridiculous, all the chandeliers and the spas that I've ever seen in my whole life. I just sprinkled them everywhere. So there was some fun to be had in writing this town too.

Amy (22:18)

Yeah. And she also is coming from a place where she's a parent. And this is really a reason to want safety because she is having hard conversations with her child as he is growing up in a neighborhood that doesn't feel safe to her anymore.

Nicola (22:33)

Yeah, I mean, you know, it's, there's like two levels of safety. And I think this is a tension that Jasmine and King have, right? She's really about like physical safety. And like, she wants her son to be able to wear his hoodie and walk down the street and not get stopped and not be perceived as a threat.

And there is like a psychic safety that King, her husband, is talking about. He wants to maintain his innocence. He doesn't want him to have to deal with having to talk about police brutality and racism. And so in some ways they've come together, the psychic and physical safety. As any parent knows, that all you want to do every day is protect your kid, right? You just don't want, especially when they're so innocent and the world is so big and great to them. And you don't want them to be disappointed in the world. And you don't want the world to teach them like the bad lessons, right? Which is that sometimes it doesn't care about you at all. And so, you know, I think that's where Jasmine is. Like she wants to protect in so many different ways.

Amy (23:41)

I know that you said that, you know, this is your first time writing a thriller and that you didn't know maybe what you were getting into. And I think that's so brave because you know, we get to, I feel like I got to an age where I'm not okay trying new things anymore. I'm like, I'm comfortable. You could have obviously sat in the same place that you were. Were you getting tired of doing the YA or you feel still on fire for the work that you were doing before and just wanted to add in a little bit of something different to your career?

Nicola (24:12)

Yeah, now that's a really good question. You know, it's weird because I used to have this terrible job, right? I used to work in finance and I used to like support a trading desk and this is not a good job, especially for me. Basically I just got yelled at by very wealthy men. And so when I was able to make the switch to writing finally, which is my dream job, I really did tell myself that I would just go where the work was, like where my heart was. And when I wrote this book, I knew immediately it wasn't young adult when I had the idea. It's just clearly not a young adult book.

I knew who Jasmine was, I knew what the ending would be. But I also really love writing young adult books and I have, I love that first love, I love those coming of age stories. And so I will definitely write more young adult books. But I want to just go where like, I guess my heart and my like sense of art takes me. You know, like I have the inkling of another idea and for both an adult and a young adult. And I think that's, I'm just going to pursue those because I used to have a crappy job and I don't want to want one again, right? So like, I don't want to feel stuck. Like I'm just trying to do the same thing because it afforded me some success because it hasn't been fun and life is short. And you just got to go where your heart is. Like, I mean, I don't know if that's silly or cliché, but that's just, that's just where I am.

Amy (25:40)

What did David think of this new project? Was he surprised you were doing this or you had talked him through it the whole way?

Nicola (25:50)

Well, remember the podcast I was telling you about, I was in the shower when I was listening to it and I remember screaming to him, I'm like, Dave! And he comes running and I'm like, the Stepford was but black. And he's like, what? He's just sort of laughing at me. And he's like, that's a good idea. So he has known, he always knows. Like, from the minute I have an idea, he's my first reader, my best reader. He reads every draft. I'm so lucky because nothing happens honestly without him. And that's one of the ways we know each other because we met in graduate school, like in our very first writing workshop together.

Amy (26:28)

I love that. What did your team think? You know, that was something that I was

like, when I was watching that show with you, I was like, I wonder what they thought when you brought this. Were they really surprised by this move?

Nicola (26:39)

Well, I think my agent was. She's like, what? But I mean, she's fabulous. And she was very supportive and read the early, terrible draft and gave me notes, like really good notes. But the teams are kind of separate, right? So the young adult team is separate from the adult team. So I have different editors, different publicists, different marketing team. And so, you know, when we went out on submission, my agent who had been surprised but then came to love the book. When we went out on submission, we did meet a few editors who were surprised that that's the direction I went in for my adult debut. And some honestly were disappointed, right? I think that some were expecting a sort of big love story and there is love in this book, but it's not a romance, right? So. But there are people who were thrilled with it too, right? And I found a home and that was good. But yeah, I mean, I think when you're in publishing, often people want you to do what has worked before because, you know, it's such a wild business, right? Sometimes readers like your books and sometimes they don't and it's up and down. And so as much unpredictability as you can take out of it, I think is better. But, you know, as the person making the art, you really do, you have to live with a book for years and years. You really have to go with a thing that's interesting to you and where your passion is. Otherwise, it doesn't work really.

Amy (28:05)

That makes perfect sense to me. And I love that you were doing something really surprising. As we are closing out this main show, which by the way, if you're in our Patreon, Nicola is going to come over there and we're going to really talk through the ending, which I think is so imperative to understand her storytelling capabilities. And you're more than welcome to join us over there.

But for those of us here, without giving anything away, what emotion are we supposed to end with?

Nicola (28:32)

This is also another fabulous question. So what I hope is that you stay up all night reading this book, right? Like you can't put it down. And then maybe you

throw it across the room at the end, or maybe not throw it across the room. But I hope that it elicits a big emotion.

And then I really just want you to talk about it, like with yourself, with your friends, like within your friend group and then outside of your friend group. Because I think that's what I really want is conversation, right? I think in our modern day, we spend so much time not talking to each other or talking past each other or sort of not having any grace with each other. Like people make mistakes. People say the wrong thing all the time. People have misunderstandings.

And we assume the worst of them when that happens. And I think that's nonsense. I think that we don't get anywhere like that, right? I think that if I say the wrong thing about your culture or whatever, and we are friends, then I think you'll allow me some grace to get it wrong and go, I'm so sorry. Tell me the right thing. And I don't think anything works outside of that. Like I don't think yelling or shaming - I mean, listen, some people are terrible and yelling and shaming is good. But most people, I think, will do the right thing if they know what the right thing is. And I think the way things change is you and me in the room in a conversation, like a real conversation, and we treat each other with grace. And so I hope people stop yelling and start talking, really talking and believing the best of each other until proven otherwise.

Amy (30:18)

Yeah, my best friend and I both read it, my friend Larry and I, he co hosts over on Patreon. And we spent probably I would say a good hour on text talking about the ending. And, you know, there were mixed reactions, I will be honest, yeah, to the ending, which I'm sure you're not surprised by. But I said, I really think this is what Nicola wants us to be doing right now. Like I can picture in my head that when you finished that last period, you were like, I can't wait to see what happens as far as conversation goes. And I was like, it's working. We're sitting here talking for a whole hour about, you know, the actions, the motives, the things that were happening. And I really felt like, you know, that's a really good indicator that this is a perfect book club book.

Nicola (31:08)

I mean, I love that you were talking about it. I mean, I am terrified about like, I'm

being honest with the reaction, but as long as people are talking to each other and from a good place and asking the question, why does it end that way? Then that's good. I've done my job.

Amy (31:25)

How are you protecting your energy knowing that you end a book on a polarizing ending?

Nicola (31:31)

I don't know if I'm protecting my energy. I don't know, but I know how to do that. Like I definitely take things in and in some ways that's not to my benefit because you know, empathetic person. I don't know. We'll see how it goes, right? Once this tour goes on, I will say that what I really want is for us to get closer like people. So I don't think that's bad, right?

Amy (32:01)

I don't think so either.

Well, we always end our main show conversation with asking our writers, what are you feeling proud of? And it can be this project or your writing career in general or anything in your personal life that you're feeling particularly proud of.

Nicola (32:16)

Well, I actually do have a thing because my little girl graduates from school. She's been at this one school for nine and a half years since she was two and a half. She is a sixth grader. She graduates in three weeks just before my book comes out. And she got into her dream school for middle school and she worked so hard and I'm really, really, really proud of her.

Amy

I love that. And what are you proud of for yourself?

Nicola (32:41)

God, I'm surviving this book launch. Listen, I'm proud of myself helping get her into that school too because it was not easy. I have not been a great mom for the last like six months.

Amy (32:55)

I love that. Well, friends, if you are a patron, we will meet you on the other side where we are going to talk about this book's ending. Nicola, this was such a joy. Thank you so much for sharing your story with us.

Nicola (33:08)

Thank you for asking such lovely, thoughtful questions. I really appreciate it.

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