

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Noah Hawley is an American film and television producer, screenwriter, composer, and author. He wrote and produced the television series *Bones* (2005-present) and also created *The Unusuals* (2009) and *My Generation* (2010). Hawley also wrote the screenplay for the film *Lies and Alibis* (2006) starring Steve Coogan and Rebecca Romijn. Noah is the author of five novels including *A Conspiracy of Tall Men*, *Other People's Weddings* and *The Punch*. His most recent novel, *Before The Fall*, debuted at #2 on the New York Times Best Sellers List. – BookBrowse

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Every person on the plane has experienced sadness or difficulties in the past. Do you think that, universally, everyone has his/her own sad story, or is this a unique trait of this particular set of characters?
2. What different meanings could the title *Before the Fall* signify?
3. “True horror, you see, comes not from the savagery of the unexpected, but from the corruption of everyday objects, spaces” (363). Do you agree? Do you see this idea reflected elsewhere in the book?
4. In what ways is this novel a traditional thriller? In what ways does it bend the conventions of the thriller genre?
5. The 24-hour news cycle is ubiquitous in our culture. How is this phenomenon portrayed in *Before the Fall*, and how does it make you rethink what we see on television every day?
6. *Before the Fall* alternates between the present day --- the investigation into the plane crash and Scott’s experience --- and flashbacks to each passenger’s life. As you read more of the flashbacks, how does your understanding of the past inform or change your understanding of the present day narrative?

7. *"He [Scott] too is striving for truth. Or maybe he alone"* (356). Much of the book revolves around a quest for the truth. What truths are debated or searched for during the course of this book? Do you believe that truth is objective? Do you agree with Bill Cunningham that *"people have a right to know"* the truth (388)?
8. Noah Hawley is well-known for his work in film and television. In what scenes do you see this reflected in the book?
9. *"Everyone has their path. The choices they've made. How any two people end up in the same place at the same time is a mystery"* (1). Much of the plot hinges on chance encounters or small decisions. What are some seemingly unimportant choices characters make that turn out to be pivotal? Do you see this sort of kismet in real life?
10. How is the concept of heroism explored throughout the book? What separates heroes from other people? How does an ordinary person become a hero?
11. After the plane crash, Scott meets many different people --- JJ, Eleanor, Doug, Layla, Gus, Bill --- who want different things from him. How do these characters affect Scott and his personal journey?
12. In many ways, Scott has been a passive observer rather than an active participant in life. In what ways does the crash change how he relates to the world around him and his sense of self?

<http://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/before-the-fall/guide>

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### Booklist

On a foggy August night, a private plane flying from Martha's Vineyard to New York City crashes into the ocean 16 minutes after takeoff, killing nine of the 11 persons aboard. The corporate jet was being used by David Bateman, multimillionaire founder of 24-hour news network ALC, traveling with his wife, Maggie; their children, Rachel, nine, and JJ, four; their friends Ben and Sarah Kipling; a Bateman security guard; a crew of three; and last-minute passenger Scott Burroughs, an artist friend of Maggie's. Because Burroughs had recently turned his life around and resumed swimming, in which he excelled as a youth, he survives, along with JJ. As the narrative weaves between the aftermath of the crash to the backstories of those who died, conspiracy theories abound about Bateman's fame and wealth (which led to Rachel's being kidnapped as a toddler), Kipling's pending indictment by the SEC, even the catastrophic scenes that are the subjects of Burroughs' recent paintings. Hawley (*The Good Father*, 2012) ramps up suspense as the investigation into the crash proceeds, along with the level of the commentary by ALC headliner Bill Cunningham, who goes to illegal ends to gather information. A pulse-pounding story, grounded in humanity.

### **Publisher's Weekly**

Emmy-, Golden Globe-, and Peabody Award-winning television producer and screenwriter Hawley's fifth novel is a masterly blend of mystery, suspense, tragedy, and shameful media hype. When a corporate jet carrying 11 crashes into the ocean just 16 minutes into a nighttime flight from Martha's Vineyard to New York in August 2015, only two people survive—Scott Burroughs, a middle-aged former drunk and minor artist, and a four-year-old boy. Scott saves the boy, swimming to shore and into a frenzy of media-shaped hero worship, federal investigations of terrorism and criminal activity, and sudden media-driven accusations of financial exploitation. Hawley cleverly uses flashback chapters for each of the passengers to reveal that one victim was a wealthy mogul, head of a 24-hour cable news network that didn't just report the news, but proudly manufactured it; one victim was a Wall Street financier about to be indicted for money laundering; and the other victims, including an armed bodyguard, also had curious pasts. Scott's life is an escalating nightmare of media hounding and federal suspicion. His only salvation is a thoughtful, deliberate NTSB investigator who focuses on facts, not speculation. This is a gritty tale of a man overwhelmed by unwelcome notoriety, with a stunning, thoroughly satisfying conclusion.

### **Kirkus Review**

In the latest by TV writer and novelist Hawley (*The Good Father*, 2012, etc.), a struggling artist becomes a hero twice, first by saving a young boy's life, then by outsmarting the anchor of a Fox-like conservative TV network. A small charter plane mysteriously crashes into the water off Martha's Vineyard, leaving only two survivors: the painter Scott Burroughs and JJ, the young son of the network owner who chartered the flight. In a well-turned rescue sequence, Scott braves the waves and sharks and makes dry land with JJ on his back. From there, the book is part whodunit and part study of Scott's survivor's guilt. Flashbacks trace the back story of each doomed passenger: network head David Bateman and his wife, Maggie, who may have had a thing for Scott; financier Ben Kipling, about to be tried for laundering terrorist money; flight attendant Emma Lightner, who recently jilted co-pilot Charlie Busch. While the rescue team works to figure out who crashed the plane, Scott struggles to get his bearings. No small feat when wealthy socialite Layla Mueller is trying hard to get him into bed and when O'Reilly-like anchorman Bill Cunningham is harassing him for an interview. Like the successful screenwriter that he is, Hawley piles on enough intrigues and plot complications to keep you hooked even if you can spot most of them a sea mile away.

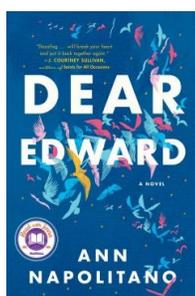
### **Library Journal**

On August 26, 2015, a private jet owned by conservative media mogul David Bateman takes off from Martha's Vineyard for a short evening flight back to New York. Eighteen minutes in, however, the plane disappears from the radar and crashes into the ocean. Miraculously, two of the 11 passengers survive: Scott Burroughs, a struggling middle-aged artist and accomplished swimmer, and four-year-old J.J. Bateman. Scott hears J.J.'s cries in the dark night, manages to find him clinging to a seat cushion among the fiery wreckage, secures the boy to himself, and, although injured, swims ten perilous miles to shore. The missing and presumed dead include J.J.'s parents and his nine-year-old sister, an Israeli

bodyguard, a wealthy Wall Street banker and his wife, and the plane's three crew members. The novel drifts forward and backward through time to reveal each passenger's story and the relationships linking them in fateful alignment to the doomed plane. The ensuing crash investigation ultimately involves not only the Federal Transportation Safety Board but also agents from the SEC and the FBI. Verdict Rich with a compelling narrative, suspenseful plot twists, and engaging characters, this fourth novel (after *The Good Father*) by an Emmy Award-winning producer and creator of FX's *Fargo* promises to be the must-read thriller of the summer.

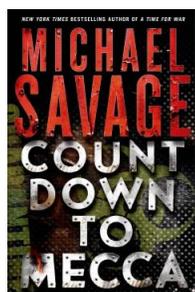
## READALIKES

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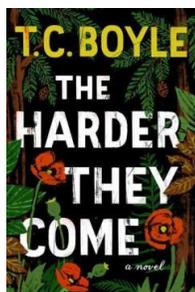
### ***Dear Edward* by Ann Napolitano**

A 12-year-old lone survivor of a plane crash investigates the stories of his less-fortunate fellow passengers before making a profound discovery about his life purpose in the face of transcendent losses.



### ***Countdown to Mecca* by Michael Savage**

Freelance reporter Jack Hatfield stumbles upon a conspiracy to destroy Mecca and enlists the help of his friends operating just outside the reach of the law.



### ***The Harder They Come* by T. C. Boyle**

Set in contemporary Northern California, *The Harder They Come* explores the volatile connections between three damaged people—an aging ex-Marine and Vietnam veteran, his psychologically unstable son, and the son's paranoid, much older lover—as they careen towards an explosive confrontation.