

One Day in Gitmo Nation

A No Agenda Novel
by Scott McKenzie

Preview Edition: Chapter One

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Preview Edition

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One Day in Gitmo Nation is a work of fiction based on the topics discussed on the No Agenda show hosted by Adam Curry and John C Dvorak.

<http://www.noagendashow.com>

About the author

Scott McKenzie lives in Cheshire, UK with his wife and children. With no education in storytelling other than a healthy appetite for fiction in all forms, Scott simply thought he'd see if he could write a novel, then wrote and self-published three in five years. Balancing family, work and a love of sport and movies, Scott writes his fast-paced stories in short sharp bursts.

PRESIDENT GREEN ASSASSINATED

President Harold Green, the forty-sixth President of the United States of America, is dead. The President was assassinated by a single shooter whilst on stage during the recording of last night's *After Hours* talk show. He had been taking part in an interview with talk show host Larry Clark. Vice President John O'Grady has been sworn in as the forty-seventh President.

At approximately 6:20pm, as President Green was answering a question about his family, the assassin jumped from his seat in the audience and fired five shots at the President. The President was struck in the chest by two bullets and an as-yet unnamed Secret Service agent was struck by one shot as he ran to the stage in an attempt to save the President's life.

The assassin was arrested at the scene by the Secret Service. Reports that the assassin is now dead and suffered two gunshot wounds to the head have been refuted by the White House. The White House has confirmed that the assassin was a white male, aged 35-40, and was a citizen of the United States. Rumors have begun to circulate that the assassin was a citizen of Jabronistan, the Middle East state where US troops have been engaged in a battle against anti-government insurgents for the past six months.

President Green's talk show appearance, which had been billed as 'When Harry Met Larry', had been given massive promotion by the TV network. The network did not broadcast the episode, instead choosing to show a compilation of highlights from President Green's brief time in office, introduced by Larry Clark, who struggled to hold back his tears. It is not yet known if or when the final moments of the President's life will be aired.

Sources at the TV studio have reported that topics of conversation included the current fears of an outbreak of canine flu and the delicate subject of the President's in-office divorce. The President was due to give evidence next week as part of the inquiry into the legality of the war in Jabronistan. Frank Oates, former director of the CIA and adviser to President Green when the decision was made to go to war, has offered to take his place.

24 hours earlier...
In the morning...

Chapter 1: The Watch List

1

The day of the president's assassination began like any other.

Terminal nine at JFK International Airport was as busy as ever. The summer was drawing to a close and the check-in desks were obscured from view by long queues of passengers snaking their way up, down, left, and right into any available space. The tired and frustrated masses inched along the first of many queues they would find themselves standing in before they eventually reached their destination, even more tired and frustrated than they were at the beginning of the day.

At just after five o'clock in the morning, the automatic entrance doors opened and Andy Conway stepped across the threshold into the air-conditioned terminal, dressed in comfortable cargo pants, a hooded top loaded with pockets, and slip-on sneakers: the uniform of a seasoned traveller. He was emotionally prepared for a familiar kind of discomfort. His knuckles turned white as he gripped the handle of his wheeled suitcase and dragged it over to the screens that told him which check-in queue he was now forced to endure.

From the first time he took a flight when he was eight years old and his father nearly got into a fight at a baggage carousel with a drunken British tourist who refused to get out of the way when his bag went past, he had always considered airports to be the places that bring out the worst in humanity. In a place where thousands of people gather together,

standing on the threshold of a week or two away from the hassles of day-to-day life, the reality is a giant room of queuing, stripping down, and answering questions barked by a jobsworth with a badge. The sound of arguing couples and screaming children filled the sterile air as Andy took his place at the back of his check-in line.

He edged his way through the queue and listened to music to drown out the noise of the general public. Avoiding eye contact or the chance of sharing an awkward moment with any fellow traveller he might find himself sitting next to on the long flight ahead, he cast his eyes round the check-in hall and saw dozens of people doing exactly the same thing. But he noticed the most interesting thing just in front of him in the queue.

The name ‘Andy Conway’ was written on an old, well-travelled baggage tag stuck to the suitcase belonging to the man standing in front of him. Not only did they have the same name, their appearances were similar too: similar height, greying brown hair, and a handsome face, if Andy did say so himself. He raised an eyebrow at the thought of bumping into someone with the same name as him and thought no more of it.

After a half-hour wait, Andy found himself standing at the front of the roped-off check-in queue. There were two desks ahead of him at which two separate lines had formed. Andy chose to stand back, intending to subvert Murphy’s Law, which always came into play when choosing a queue at supermarket checkouts. He heard a grumble from behind.

“Excuse me,” exclaimed a female voice in a tone that was a long-distance flight away from civil, accompanied by a tap on the shoulder. Andy turned his head only far enough to see that he was being addressed by an irate woman standing in front of her mousey husband who was holding their sleeping toddler in his arms. They were dressed in what Andy suspected was their Sunday best: a painfully obvious attempt to get an upgrade, which would surely not work and they would then be destined to spend the rest of the day adjusting

their uncomfortable clothes while they were crammed into their economy seats.

He'd never met these people before, but he'd met their type countless times: once-a-year travellers who think they deserve special treatment just because that's what they usually get in their own little bubble. Andy was a regular flier and knew that those rules didn't apply in an airport. If you don't hand over your hard-earned cash for special treatment, it's every man for himself, locked in a massive structure together where no one cares who you are. You are just another schmuck in a queue and you will be treated with the same contempt as the next schmuck.

Andy raised an eyebrow and let out a grunt that said, *What do you want?*

The lady took a deep breath before speaking with a tone that clearly said, *I can't believe you don't know why I'm angry.*

"There are two lines here. Which desk are you waiting for?" she demanded with crossed arms. Andy knew she would be tapping her toe as well, but he couldn't bring himself to give her any more of his attention than a glance over his shoulder. Her husband was maintaining his silence, something Andy assumed he'd learned to do after a married life filled with futile protests.

Andy removed his ear buds and waved his hand in a gesture towards each desk, where their fellow passengers were going through the check-in procedure. "Whichever one's free next."

He resisted adding "We're not in the supermarket, lady".

"You're not supposed to do that. You need to join a queue." He had predicted she would say that as soon as he felt the tap on his shoulder.

"This is the fairest way."

Before the argument could continue any further, a desk became free. For the second time that morning, Andy Conway breathed a sigh of relief and took a step forward.

“Did you pack your luggage yourself?” the pretty female check-in assistant asked.

Just like every time he went through the laborious check-in procedure, Andy bit his lip and answered “Yes, I did,” rather than “No, a nice man with dark skin and a long black beard offered to do it for me.”

While the check-in assistant was tagging his suitcase and checking his passport, out of the corner of his eye he saw the woman who had been behind him in the queue approach the next desk with her family in tow. Within seconds, she was demanding an upgrade, but the assistant behind the desk refused to award any freebies. With the thought that he might find himself sitting next to his latest nemesis or, worse than that, her soon-to-be-screaming child, he asked his assistant how much an upgrade would cost.

“Since you are a frequent flier, the cost will be fifty dollars,” was the answer and, without batting an eyelid, Andy Conway reached into his pocket and slapped five ten-dollar bills on the desk.

“Sold!” he announced, with far too much enthusiasm for anyone to summon before six in the morning.

“Okay, let me just find you a seat,” she said, taking the money without looking his way. “That’s weird,” she said, after tapping at the keyboard and doing a double take at her screen.

“Is there a problem?”

The assistant shook her head as if blanking an occurrence of *déjà vu* from her mind. “No, nothing to worry about.”

She gave Andy his boarding pass and luggage ticket and wished him a good flight. Andy threw his carry-on bag over his shoulder and made his way past the family he was glad to be avoiding for the rest of the flight. He wondered if the check-in assistant had seen that the other Andy Conway had been booked on the same flight. He then wondered if that also meant his namesake was also sitting in first class. He

gave another internal chuckle at the thought of sitting next to the other Andy Conway. He'd never met anyone with his name before.

Andy's pulse quickened as he approached passport control. Even though he was certain of his complete innocence of the slightest wrong-doing (he'd never had so much as a parking ticket), he always felt like he was walking through passport control or customs with 'I am a terrorist' tattooed on his forehead. He walked past the passengers who had forgotten they couldn't take any more than 100ml of liquid onboard the plane and were throwing away their industrial-size bottles of shampoo. He always wondered why people would bother taking such massive bottles away with them if they were only going away for two weeks at most. In the distance, he heard a man shout "Don't touch my junk, bro!" followed by a commotion, but he was too far back in the line to see what was going on.

After another eternity standing in line, he walked up to the only passport control desk that was manned (or womaned in this case) and handed over his passport and boarding pass.

"Where are you going?" she barked at him.

"Italy," he said.

"This ticket says Rome on it."

"Rome is in Italy," he replied in a deadpan tone.

The assistant swiped his passport under the scanner and stopped to look at the screen for a second. She then took a pen out of her shirt pocket and scribbled a capital F on his boarding pass. She looked past Andy and gave a 'come here' wave with her hand to someone behind him. Andy turned round to find himself confronted with the biggest TSA guard he'd ever seen and couldn't help but notice the gun on his belt.

"What's going on?" Andy asked, with the onset of panic in his mind betrayed by the crack in his voice.

"Please go with the guard, sir," she ordered and handed his passport and boarding pass to the guard.

“What’s going on?” he asked again.

“Please come with me, sir,” the guard said very calmly, “We don’t want to make a scene.”

3

Andy found himself standing in a bare, well-lit room, about ten feet square, with a desk against the far wall. Andy’s fears doubled as he looked round the cramped room.

No windows. No cameras. No one knew he was here and, more importantly, he didn’t know why he was here. The guard slammed the door behind them.

“What’s going on?” he asked for a third time. For a third time, he received no answer.

The door opened and a man with three stripes on his brown shirt walked in. Without exchanging any words, the guard handed Andy’s passport and boarding pass to the man with the stripes and stood to attention in the corner of the room to await orders from his superior. The man rifled through the passport, examining the archive of immigration stamps in great detail.

“Your name is Andrew Conway,” the officer said, and only looked up when he didn’t get a response within the time he was expecting. “I asked you a question. Is your name Andrew Conway?”

Andy hadn’t realised it was a question. “Yes, my name is Andrew Conway.”

“You go to Europe a lot.”

“Yes, it’s with business, I’m a—”

“Silence! I didn’t ask you a question.”

Andy frowned and maintained a confused silence. After another minute of flicking through his passport, the officer barked at him again.

“Open up the bag.”

Andy put his bag on the desk and started to open it.

“Not you!” the officer shouted. He looked at the guard and repeated his order.

With the precision of a bomb disposal expert, the guard unzipped the bag and peeked inside. He carefully picked the items out of the bag and placed them on the desk, one by one.

Andy suddenly realised the contents of his bag might look a bit suspect to the casual observer, never mind these Nazis from the Transportation Security Administration. He was an engineer for Synergy Services, a multinational IT corporation. He was required to travel with his laptop and a wide range of tools and spare parts, which he tried to tell the officer, but was cut off mid-sentence with another shout of “Silence!”

The officer paid no attention to the cables and other technological paraphernalia that came out of the bag until the last item emerged. Very carefully, the guard lifted a bottle of 7UP out of the bag. Andy realised he’d forgotten about it, and the stringent rules about taking liquids on planes meant that anything outside the rules was immediately treated as a potential explosive device.

“What have we here?” the officer asked, delivering his line like a prosecutor might when presenting the damning piece of evidence to the jury.

4

The other Andy Conway sat down with a coffee and three newspapers. He hadn’t dared to go through passport control yet, instead opting to see what alerts, if any, his checking-in had raised. The table he chose gave him a good view of the line of travellers waiting to go through passport control and the army of guards patrolling the retail monument that doubled as an airport terminal. As far as he could tell, the security staff were all going about their business as normal.

He let his coffee cool down as he flicked through the pages of the broadsheets. His pulse slowed as he turned more and more pages. There were no reports about experimental research, certainly nothing he was involved in. There was

nothing about missing persons, certainly not from the company he worked for. And there was nothing about the President, certainly nothing other than the fact that President Green had attended the concert by teen singing sensation Anna Indiana at Madison Square Garden last night, and his children had been conspicuous by their absence.

The cappuccino went down in four large gulps. He just wanted the caffeine to keep him alert long enough to get onto the plane and off the ground. After that, he was planning to sleep all the way to Europe. Sleep was a commodity he'd been short of recently. The world of scientific and political scandals doesn't sleep, so neither did he, and there had never been a scientific or political scandal like this before.

He looked at his watch. His flight would be taking off in just over an hour. *It's now or never*, he thought. *If you don't go through passport control, you can't get out of the country that wants you dead.*

The other Andy Conway got to his feet and joined the queue to go through passport control. There was no need for him to worry, though. Little did he know that another Andy Conway had already gone through passport control. Little did he know that the software which alerted the passport control officer to write a capital F on the boarding pass deleted the flag once the first person with the flagged name had been identified. Without this in mind, the other Andy Conway had his passport and boarding pass returned to him by the officer and cruised through to the departure lounge.

Coincidentally, the IT company that created the bug-ridden passport control software was Synergy Services, the company that the unfortunate Andy Conway worked for. Had both Andy Conways known this fact, it's likely that one of them would have found it funnier than the other.

“What’s it doing in there?” the man with the stripes asked.

“I forgot about it. I bought it last night on the way home from work and must have left it in there when I packed the rest of my things.”

The guard thrust the bottle into Andy’s face. “Drink it,” he said.

“What, all of it?”

“No. Just taste it so we know it’s not toxic.”

Andy took the bottle in his hands and twisted the cap, which cracked the seal as he opened it. He pointed this out to the officer but the man with stripes didn’t care.

“Drink it,” he repeated.

Andy swallowed a mouthful and waited a few seconds to prove that he wasn’t about to keel over and die. The officer grabbed the bottle out of Andy’s hand and sniffed the contents, then handed it to the guard who did the same. They gave each other a nod. The guard grabbed the cap out of Andy’s hand and screwed it onto the bottle.

“Put everything back in your bag,” the officer said. “We’ll be back.”

They slammed the door behind them, leaving Andy alone in the room. He was shell-shocked. Was this really happening to him? Surely they couldn’t think he was a terrorist? Then it dawned on him.

They must think I’m the other Andy Conway. Who the hell is that guy?

He stuffed everything back in his bag and, after a few minutes of pacing round the tiny room, he sat down on the desk. He checked his watch. The plane would take off in less than an hour, which meant he only had about twenty minutes to board the plane before the gate was due to close.

The more he looked at his watch, the quicker the second hand seemed to tick round. He stood up and paced some more. He put his hands in his pockets and realised his captors hadn’t taken his mobile phone from him. It had a

decent signal, so he connected to the internet and began some amateur detective work.

He searched Google for ‘Andrew Conway’, which returned 14,000 results. He refined the search to ‘Andrew Conway New York’, which cut the results down to 489 results. He chose the first link, which took him to a *New York Times* article from a couple of years ago about a visit to a research lab in New York by Senator Harry Green, who at the time was in the running to be the Democratic nominee for the next year’s presidential election. Andy scrolled down the page and found his name.

Head of research Dr. Andrew Conway hosted the tour of the Alset research facilities, which have taken great leaps forward in the cloning of mammals in the last five years.

6

In the corridor outside, the officer told the guard to wait by the door and let no one in or out. He marched down the corridor and went into another empty room, then took out his phone and called the number he had saved in his contacts list under the name ‘Escalation’.

The officer hadn’t called that number for over six months. It had been a long time since he’d seen a boarding pass with an F written on it. Why did he have to delay this poor schmuck before his flight? It was obvious to him that this guy had done nothing wrong, but there was a procedure to follow and the people who wrote this procedure were the ones who could make or break your career. Or make or break your life.

The gruff voice on the other end picked up the call almost immediately.

“Yeah?” he growled.

“It’s Officer Mills from JFK. We’ve picked up a flagged passenger.”

“What’s his name?”

“Andrew Conway.”

“Really? Give me a second.”

The officer heard some tapping at a keyboard in the background, followed by a chuckle.

“Has he given you any trouble?” the man on the other end asked.

“No. None at all. Right now he’s sitting alone in one of our holding rooms, shitting his pants.”

“Let him go.”

“Yes, sir.”

“One more thing,” the gruff voice said, “are any of your officers taking the same flight as that passenger?”

“Yes, sir. A routine—”

“Get them off the plane. Now. But make sure that guy gets on the plane. Use force if you have to.” With that, the man on the other end hung up.

7

Andy sneaked his mobile phone back into his pocket as soon as his captors walked through the door. Something in their demeanour had changed. Andy could tell they weren’t interested in him anymore.

“You can go,” the officer said.

“What was all this about?” Andy asked.

“Our mistake. We’re very sorry for any inconvenience.”

“I think I know what the problem is. There’s another man on my flight with the same name as me.”

“You’d better go if you’re going to catch your flight, sir.”

“But ...”

“Have a nice day, sir.”

The officer stood aside and beckoned Andy to leave, which he promptly did, but he still had the thought nagging his mind that he was about to get on a plane with someone the TSA needed to speak to on board.

The guard escorted Andy back down the corridor, through the door at the end, and past passport control. With an insincere “Have a nice flight,” the guard left Andy standing in the departure lounge. Andy checked the departure boards and then his watch. With ten minutes left to board, he walked over to a vending machine to get a bottle of Hero-Cola and made his way toward the gate, only to be confronted by representatives from Duo-Cola giving out free bottles of a new soft drink.

Upon reaching the gate, he joined yet another queue of passengers waiting to board the plane and he saw his namesake at the front of the line.

Should I go and speak to him? Andy thought. Should I ask him if he was interrogated as well? Maybe I should report him.

Andy looked around him and saw a TSA officer standing at the end of the moving walkway. It was the officer who had questioned him just minutes earlier.

Andy left his place in the queue, knowing that if he had to rejoin it, he would have to go to the back. People were always so precious about their place in a queue but it wasn't as if the plane was going to take off without everyone in the queue, was it?

The officer took a step toward Andy as he approached. “Yes, sir, can I help you?” he asked. There was no recognition in his eyes. He was staring at Andy as if they had never met before, as if he hadn't been interrogating him just minutes earlier.

“The man I was telling you about—the other Andy Conway—is in the queue over there. He's going to get on my plane.”

“I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about, sir,” he replied, with a blank expression on his face.

“What? You were looking for someone called Andy Conway. The man you were looking for is over there in the queue. He's about to get on the plane.”

“I'm afraid you're mistaken, sir.” The officer's tone of voice changed and was Andy could see the recognition in his

eyes. “Now, let me be clear about this: return to the line and board the plane.”

With that, the officer squared his shoulders and seemed to grow a few inches taller.

“But, he’s just there. Get the crew to check his passport; you’ll see I’m not lying.”

“I don’t think you’re a liar, sir.” The officer left that last comment hanging in the air, all the while staring into Andy’s eyes.

Andy realised his protests would get him nowhere. “Whatever’s going on here, I don’t like it,” he said. “I’m going to take a later flight.”

As Andy took his first step, the officer grabbed his arm and pulled him back. The officer didn’t let go and tightened his grip until Andy could feel the blood being cut off from his hand.

“Sir,” the officer growled, “may I remind you that knives are prohibited items in the cabin of an airplane.”

Now Andy was really confused. “Knives? What do you mean?”

“I’d merely like to remind you that knives are prohibited on board any airplanes taking off from any U.S. airport. Knives like this one.”

Concealing his actions from everyone else in the departure lounge, the officer made sure that Andy saw him take a Stanley knife out of his pocket and extend the blade.

“Now turn around, forget everything you’ve seen and heard, and get on the fucking plane.”

8

Andy returned to the queue. He wasn’t sure if the officer would have planted the knife on him or if he was planning to stab him there and then. Andy knew one thing for sure: he didn’t want to stick around to find out. He thought he’d take his chances on the plane, refusing several advances from Duo-Cola representatives to take a free

sample bottle of their new peanut butter flavour cola as he edged his way towards the gate.

As he reached the front of the queue, Andy glanced back and saw the officer still standing there, smiling at him with dead eyes. Only when the officer was happy that Andy had his ticket checked and was boarding the plane did he walk away. The member of the cabin crew handed Andy his ticket and noticed the drink in his hand.

“I’m sorry, sir,” she said, “I can’t permit you to board this flight with your drink.”

“It’s okay, I bought this after going through passport control. The bottle’s sealed. Look.” Andy said, showing her the bottle.

“No sir, I can’t let you board the plane with a bottle of Hero-Cola. You see, Duo-Cola is our soft drinks partner on this route.”

Andy took a second to process what she was saying. “You’re saying that I can’t take a bottle of Hero-Cola on your airline because you’ve done some deal with Duo-Cola?”

“You can’t take Hero-Cola on this *flight*. That’s correct, sir.” Her voice said *I’m happy to help*, but her face said *fuck you*.

“Wait a minute. You mean I can take it on some of your airline’s other flights, just not this one?”

“That’s correct, sir. It’s all in the terms and conditions. Since the economic downturn has affected passenger numbers, the airline has had to find other revenue streams,” she recited, no doubt from the list of rebuttals she’d been told to memorise. “If you give me your bottle of Hero-Cola, one of the Duo-Cola representatives will be happy to give you a replacement beverage.”

“Peanut butter Coke? No, thanks.”

“It’s Duo-Cola, sir. Peanut butter Duo-Cola. You’ve never tasted anything like it.” This last line was delivered with a smile. Andy wondered why it sounded so hollow until he saw the poster hanging above the gate with the slogan

“Peanut Butter Duo-Cola – You’ve never tasted anything like it!”

“Oh, brother,” Andy sighed and handed the attendant his bottle of Hero-Cola and headed down the boarding tunnel. He did not accept the free bottle of Duo-Cola.

9

A stereotypically effeminate and overly-tanned large male member of the cabin crew handed Andy a copy of the *New York Times* as he boarded the plane and turned left into first class. The day’s earlier events weren’t on his mind; all he could think about was the other Andy Conway that was going to be on this flight. His namesake’s potential for all manner of terrorist activity was making his head spin.

Just as he’d suspected from the moment the check-in assistant had to do a double-take as she booked his seat, Andy found himself sitting down in the aisle seat next to the other Andy Conway. They exchanged civil smiles with each other and both stuck their noses into their newspapers.

His heart pounding with worry about what was about to happen on this flight, Andy skimmed through the pages without reading the articles, just looking at the pictures of people who had fallen ill due to the canine flu epidemic that was sweeping the nation. He didn’t pay any attention to the paparazzi pictures of President Green at last night’s concert at Madison Square Garden, his arms round blonde dancers more than half his age. His daughters were supposedly safely tucked in their beds. The headline read ‘Lothario in Chief’.

When Andy thought he couldn’t worry any more about how long he had left on this planet, an announcement crackled over the PA system.

“Ladies and gentlemen, please stay in your seats. TSA health officers will be doing a quick tour of the cabin to assess your well-being. This is a new requirement from the TSA due to the current wave of the canine flu pandemic. Please sit still and stay calm. It will be over in a few minutes.”

Stay calm? Andy thought. When he saw the figures burst through the curtain into first class, staying calm felt impossible.

Two men in white rubber hazmat suits marched down the aisles to the front of the plane. Oxygen was fed into their suits from tanks strapped to their backs and their faces were obscured beneath blacked-out plastic masks, giving them a distinct air of Darth Vader, but instead of wielding lightsabers they were brandishing what looked like ray guns from a 1950s sci-fi movie.

As they made their way down the cabin, they examined each passenger for symptoms of canine flu. Seat by seat, they held up their ray guns and pointed them at the passengers' foreheads, all of which were coated in a thin film of nervous sweat by the time each examination came round. After a few seconds, the gun made a beep and they moved on, leaving the passenger breathing a sigh of relief and imagining what could have happened if the test had been positive.

Andy realised there was no escape for anyone. The cabin crew told you how to get out of the plane if it crashed, but didn't give any advice whatsoever on help you escaping from the big metal tube when there were suited soldiers inside it, pointing strange weapons at everyone.

Andy Conway and his namesake exchanged a look of concern.

The man sitting in front of Andy started coughing. He tried to stop himself but his hacking got worse until it sounded like he was going to bring up a lung as well as the mucus that was stuck inside his throat. One of the TSA agents did a quick-step down the aisle and zapped the passenger's head. Instead of beeping, the gun let out a loud buzz and a flashing red light reflected in the hazmat suit's face mask.

"What was that?" the passenger asked, struggling for breath between coughs. "Why did it turn red?" He tried to protest, but his coughing got worse until he was doubled

over, struggling for breath. Andy shifted in his seat and covered his mouth and nose with his hands, desperately hoping he wouldn't breathe in whatever was coming out of the passenger's mouth. The other passengers saw him and did the same.

"Help me," the passenger wheezed between shallow breaths, "I can't breathe."

The agent holstered his ray gun and to the astonishment of everyone on board, he drew a real pistol and pointed it at the passenger. Andy heard gasps and screams from all corners of the first class section but stifled his own reaction, doing his best to remain anonymous while shifting in his seat to get out of the line of fire. A woman shouted "Oh my God, they're going to shoot him!" The agent's partner brandished his pistol and told everyone to shut the fuck up and sit still. A split second later, everyone on board had complied.

"Brian, I need some help over here," the agent said as he dragged the passenger up off the floor and into his seat.

His partner made his way across the aisles. "You got a positive over there, Kevin?"

"Affirmative."

The agent with the gun shouted in the passenger's face. The amplification of his voice through the microphone embedded in his suit made it certain that everyone in first class heard his words.

"Sir, you must do exactly what I say. Stand up very slowly and follow my colleague off the plane."

"What are you talking about?" he said, with panic breaking his voice. "I'm going on vacation."

"No, you're not. Stand up, sir. I won't tell you again."

Shaking from head to toe, the man stood up and started coughing again. There were screams from other passengers, and Brian the agent reminded everyone to shut the fuck up once more. The passenger was handed over to another agent waiting at the exit, who muttered a comment to him as he escorted him off the plane.

“Try not to worry, sir. A lot of things can set our sensors off. Sometimes it’s just nerves.”

Andy was next. Kevin returned and, with his pistol still in one hand, he raised the ray gun with the other and pointed it at Andy’s forehead. All rational thought went out the window and Andy’s mind found ways to convince him he had canine flu and, that within the next few seconds, he would be yanked out of his seat and frogmarched out of the plane to be probed and tested by government scientists.

Reality and rational thought returned when the ray gun beeped. Then Andy found himself hoping that his namesake was suffering from canine flu; if he was taken off the plane, then Andy could stop worrying about what he may have done or be planning to do. But, for the second time in as many minutes, someone called Andy Conway tested negative for canine flu.

With faint screams echoing down the cabin from behind the curtain, the men in suits completed their checks and the remaining passengers were left with the friendly comment, “Thank you for your cooperation. Have a good flight.”

10

Andy’s nerves eased after take-off when his namesake leaned his head against the window and quickly went off to sleep. Sitting in the aisle seat, Andy took some perverse comfort in the knowledge that if the man next to him wanted to hijack the plane, he would have to wake up and ask him if he could get past.

As the plane had taxied onto the runway, the cabin crew had strutted down the aisles, spraying God-knows-what into the air from an unmarked aerosol can. After take-off, the sharp unnatural taste reminiscent of cheap air freshener was still lingering at the back of Andy’s throat when the seatbelt light pinged off and the cabin crew came to take his drink order. He asked for a Diet Coke.

“We don’t have Diet Coke. Is Diet Duo-Cola okay?”

He nodded, wondering what reaction he would have got if he'd said no. But with a very long flight ahead, he didn't want to antagonise the people who would be serving his next two meals. He finished his miniature can of Diet Duo-Cola and decided to follow one of his rules of air travel.

Go to the bathroom early or don't go at all.

With the drinks trolley blocking his route to the first class convenience, Andy headed back through the curtain into economy class and, as soon as he opened the door to the toilet, he realised he hadn't gone early enough. Even though the facility looked clean, the rank stench of up-chucked peanut butter Duo-Cola made him reel backwards.

Andy tried and failed to hold his breath for the whole time he was submerged in the olfactory hell-hole. He opened the door to find himself face-to-face with another passenger and instantly knew from the look on her face that she thought the smell in there was his doing. Not wanting to stand there and plead his case that he wasn't responsible for the state of the toilet, Andy retreated behind the curtain and back into his seat in first class.

As he landed in his seat, his namesake stirred but didn't wake up. Andy looked around the cabin. The more time that passed, the more Andy's current situation began to feel like normality. He asked himself if his experience at the airport was just a mistake, so he resolved to ask the man next to him about their names when he woke up. Andy opened his newspaper again and decided to read the words of the articles this time, when his namesake muttered something in his sleep.

"No, I won't do this anymore."

11

The newspaper was filled with articles about the President. Since his divorce six months ago, he had been the favourite topic of tabloids and broadsheets alike. Even when there was real news to report, all anyone seemed to talk about

was the President's love life, rather than the war in Jabronistan, the financial crisis, or the canine flu pandemic.

It was unheard of for the President to divorce the First Lady, and even more improbable that he would be the one to win custody of their children. Now the papers couldn't decide whether he was the world's best father or a party animal of the highest order. Opinion polls revealed the public wasn't sitting on the fence, though—they loved him.

For once, the paper also contained an article about his political activities, with a preview of the first passing-out ceremony of the Junior Reserve, which the President was due to attend that day. The economic downturn featured heavily as well, with short articles dotted around describing the demise of small companies. On the flip-side, large corporations seemed to be getting the big handouts to delay their demise for another twelve months.

The Carlson Motor Company was a prime example. With mounting pension and healthcare commitments, costs had to be drastically cut and the quality of their cars had suffered as a result. The drop in quality coincided with their customers' increasing expectation of value for money that plastic interiors and the dwindling array of luxuries did not satisfy. Was it any surprise that American consumers now chose higher-spec cars from Korean and Japanese manufacturers ahead of home-grown companies who were charging the same price for a smaller car with half the spec? The newspaper reported that the Carlson Motor Company's refusal to drastically change its business strategy left the government with no option but to refuse them any more bail-out money. Thousands of staff would be let go but the men at the top would still keep their bonuses. Auto workers' unions had announced they were considering industrial action.

Then Andy came to a double-page spread that focused on nothing but the worldwide outbreak of canine flu. The main article stated that the World Health Organisation had decided to declare the crisis a pandemic according to

their rules. The WHO would be initiating the necessary measures that had been agreed by governments around the world, but there were no details in the article of exactly what those measures were. Another article said the Middle East state of Jabronistan had decided to cull all stray dogs in an effort to stop the spread of the virus, unaware that the only reason canine flu got its moniker was from its code name H1K9 and the virus was actually spread by horses.

Andy almost missed a piece of news that was buried in a small box in the corner of the page. It read:

Scientist Missing

Renowned scientist and presidential health adviser Doctor Andrew Conway has disappeared. He has not been seen at his home or at his place of work in Washington for the last two days. Doctor Conway has been advising the President on matters relating to his personal health.

12

Andy flicked through the newspaper as fast as he could but he was unable to find any more information relating to the tiny article. It had come so close to satisfying his curiosity about his travel companion but now posed more questions than it answered. All the while, his namesake remained in a deep sleep. The in-flight meal came and went without any response from him.

Andy's mind was running a mile a minute, imagining all kinds of weird and wonderful reasons why the supposed fugitive next to him might be on the run. This previous idea that his namesake was a terrorist suddenly seemed like a cliché. *Does he know something he shouldn't about the President? Could he be a spy for a foreign agency? Is that why he's on this flight to Europe? Is he heading back home now that he's done what he needed to do? And if so, what has he done? Is the President going to die? Has he poisoned him?*

These questions and more played on a loop in his mind until the other Andy Conway finally woke up. Andy

tried not to look directly at him but kept a close eye on his actions. He opened his eyes and looked surprised for a second, as if he'd forgotten he was on a plane and had expected to wake up in his own bed. He rubbed his eyes and looked at his watch, then leaned in to speak to Andy.

“Hey buddy, how long have we been in the air?”

“Ages. We’ll be there in a few hours.”

“And there were no problems with the take-off?”

“None at all, apart from the guys in suits of course. Why?”

The namesake stared at Andy with a look on his face that told him he shouldn’t have asked.

“No reason,” the namesake said after a pause. “I guess I’m not the world’s most confident flyer.”

Andy flicked through the newspaper he had thumbed to within an inch of its life, trying to look nonchalant until his curiosity got the better of him.

“Look,” he began, “I couldn’t help noticing that you have the same name as me.”

“Really?”

“Yes. When I was in the check-in queue I noticed the tag on your bag said your name was Andy Conway. Is that right?”

He looked around and nodded, then whispered, “Keep your voice down.”

Andy didn’t ask why. He flicked to the article in the newspaper and pointed to it. “That’s you, isn’t it?”

His namesake scanned the article and nodded again. “To be honest, I’m surprised how easy it was to get through security and onto this plane. I thought they would have flagged my passport.”

“At least that answers one question I’ve had all day.”

“What’s that?”

“Why I was taken into a room and interrogated by some guys from the TSA.”

“Really? As soon as they notice there are two of us on this plane, they’ll know I’m definitely on here. Did the TSA say anything to you?”

“No. They just searched my bag and acted like a bunch of jerks. Then they let me go and threatened me when I tried to tell them you were on the plane.”

“You told them I was on the plane?”

“Well, yes. I thought they were looking for a terrorist with your name. I saw you and told them. I’ve been sitting here shitting my pants waiting on you to blow up the plane.”

He laughed. “Don’t worry, I’m not going to blow up the plane.”

“So why do they want you? And who are *they*?”

13

“Look,” he began, “I work for the President.”

“I know. It says so in the newspaper article.”

“No, what I mean is I’m his chief medical adviser. I know everything about his health. All his medical history. All the problems he’s had since he was elected last year. Everything.”

“That must pay pretty well.”

“First class all the way,” he said, as they both accepted a complimentary glass of champagne from the cabin crew who were doing the rounds.

“So why have you run away?”

“It’s because of what I know. Look, I probably shouldn’t tell you too much, but whatever’s going to happen today will probably happen before we land. If we land, of course.”

“What do you mean, *if* we land?”

“You don’t think they’ve got the power to bring this plane down?”

Andy frowned. “You’re not making any sense. Who are *they*? The government?”

“Don’t be so naive. This goes way higher than the government.”

“If you really are on the run and you knew *they* would be able to find you, why did you use your own passport? I’m starting to smell bullshit.”

“I didn’t have time to get a fake passport made up. I only found out a few days ago about what’s going to happen today.”

“So what is going to happen today?”

“The President is going to—.”

Before the words could leave his lips, a deafening rumble filled the cabin as the plane started to shake.

14

The seatbelt light pinged and the pilot’s voice crackled over the PA system. “Please take your seats. We’re experiencing a little turbulence.”

The bright blue sky and blinding sunshine outside the plane had been replaced by a thick grey cloud. Everyone on board buckled their seatbelts and gripped their armrests like they were holding on for dear life. Couples squeezed each other’s white-knuckled hands. A few passengers could be heard whispering prayers to their God of choice; some of them having just discovered religion.

The shaking got worse. The cabin was thrown left, right, up and down. Drinks flew from tray tables, showering everyone with champagne, hot coffee, and peanut butter Duo-Cola. The plane took a sharp dip and climbed again, sending a drinks trolley hurtling down the aisle. Andy just managed to duck out of the way but a man who was shaken to the side at the wrong moment got the full force of it in the back of his head. His unconscious body flopped around in his seat as blood dripped from a deep gash in his head.

The doors of the overhead lockers flew open and the luggage showered down on the passengers. A coat landed on Andy’s head, cushioning him from the blow of a flying carton of cigarettes. Andy was a regular traveller, but this was the worst plane ride he’d ever taken. He had a terrible feeling it would be the last.

A stewardess struggled to her feet, grabbed the PA microphone, and returned to her fold-down seat. “Ladies and gentlemen, in the interest of safety, please assume the brace position.”

Almost everyone on board then bent over in their seats and put their hands behind their heads, apart from one know-it-all who picked the worst time to voice his opinion.

“No, don’t do it. They only tell you that so it breaks your neck when we crash!”

Cue mass hysteria.

Andy heard people all around him scream with all the power in their lungs, especially those who only heard the phrase “when we crash”. The screams of the passengers came close to drowning out the terrible sounds of the weather outside that was trying to contort the plane into an unnatural shape, but didn’t quite succeed.

Andy was being thrown around, his feeble lap belt struggling to hold him in his seat. The sensation was like being on a rollercoaster, but with the screams of enjoyment replaced by the terror of not knowing if there was any chance of the ride ending safely. The panic on Andy’s face was a stark contrast to the knowing look his namesake gave him as he leaned over to talk to him.

“Y-y-you see w-what I m-m-mean?” his namesake shouted.

“What are y-you t-t-talking ab-b-out?”

“Y-you think th-this is a coin-c-cidence?”

“You’re c-c-crazy! This is j-just a b-b-it of turbulence!”

A bag fell from an overhead locker and struck a passenger two rows down in the head, knocking him out cold.

“Th-this is n-no coincidence!”

“Bullshit! I don’t believe you. The g-government can’t change the w-weather!”

“Yes they can! They can—” He stopped mid-sentence as the turbulence ended in an instant. The noise of the

shaking plane disappeared and the cabin descended into silence.

“They can do whatever they want,” he continued, “only this wasn’t done by the government.”

Sunshine broke through the open windows, with small fluffy white clouds taking the place of the grey soup that had been there just seconds earlier. After taking a few seconds to assess the impact of the turbulence on the cabin’s interior, the passengers began screaming once more.

15

Andy loosened his grip on the armrests and winced as a sharp pain shot through his fingers. He wiggled his fingers to get the feeling back in them and smiled as he realised the only other time he did that was on long drives after gripping the steering wheel for hours at a time. His wife and kids always laughed and copied him when he did that. He hoped he would live long enough for them to poke fun at him again.

With his senses returning to normal, Andy took a deep breath to try to calm his pounding heart. He wished he hadn’t, and coughed as he drew in the rank air of the cabin that was laced with the stench of vomit, urine, and everything else that went flying as they passed through the turbulence that had come from nowhere.

“Very sorry about that, ladies and gentlemen,” the pilot announced. “That was a particularly bad patch of turbulence that took us all by surprise. I can confirm that we’re on the other side and the sky from here to the Spanish coast is perfectly clear. Please stay in your seats, be patient, and the cabin crew will attend to your needs.”

The screaming died down a little and the most heavily injured passengers were attended to. A stewardess asked for any doctors on board to make themselves known and, within a few minutes, a couple of men with grey hair were bandaging up the injured.

“You’re a doctor, aren’t you?” Andy asked his namesake.

“Well, I’ve got a PhD but I’m not an MD. I’d be no use to those people. Anyway, this isn’t the end.”

“So you’re sticking with your crazy story that this wasn’t turbulence?”

“Oh, it was definitely turbulence. No doubt about that. There’s also no doubt in my mind that it was put there on purpose.”

“That really is crazy.”

“Look outside the plane. There was a clear blue sky for most of the flight and it’s back again now. You mean to say we just happened to fly into a tiny patch of the worst turbulence known to man without the pilot seeing it coming?”

“It didn’t feel that tiny.”

“Come on, it only lasted for a minute or so. Any pilot worth his salt would have seen a cloud like that coming a mile off.”

“Alright, let’s just say the government or whoever *could* create turbulence out of thin air, and let’s say they *could* target it at a plane flying over the Atlantic, but if they really wanted you dead, why would they bother going to the hassle of doing it? Why not just get someone to shoot you in the head?”

Andy’s namesake thought about it for a second, then came to his conclusion. “Of course!” he exclaimed, like he’d just solved a cryptic crossword puzzle. “Two birds with one stone.”

“What?”

His namesake took the safety card out of the pocket in front of him and pointed to the plane information. “Look, this is a plane made by Aircoach.”

“So what?”

“You remember the plane that went down in Denver last week?”

“The one that ran out of fuel?”

“That plane was made by Lockwell. It’s tit for tat. They’re trying to bring down an Aircoach plane for revenge and they get to do away with me at the same time.”

“This is complete nonsense. You’re insane! Even if all this really is going on, you haven’t told me why they want you dead.”

Andy’s namesake turned to him and looked him straight in the eye. “Because I know the President is going to be assassinated. Tonight.”

16

Andy considered everything that had happened to him since he checked in for his flight. The turbulence could be a coincidence, but he still had no real explanation for his run-in with the security staff at the airport. Could all the events of the day be related? Could his time locked in that tiny room with the TSA really have anything to do with a plot to kill the president? The nonsense his namesake was coming out with made him think he could dream up anything to explain his treatment and end up believing it, but he also wondered about the small-world coincidence of being sat next to someone with the same name. Surely someone somewhere must have been behind that?

But whether he liked it or not, Andy knew he was now joining the other Andy Conway for the ride. Sitting in a plane thousands of miles from home, in a few hours he would either be free from this conspiracy wacko or be dead in a flaming mess of twisted metal and luggage.

“The President’s going to be assassinated? How do you know?”

“I’ve known about it for days.”

“What? So you *are* a terrorist!”

“Don’t be stupid. It’s not all black and white. There are no good guys and bad guys, just different types of bad guys.”

“What do you mean?”

“Look, there are plots against the President’s life every week. Some weeks there are plots every day. This one’s been in the works since his inauguration.”

Andy couldn’t believe what he was hearing. It showed on his face. His namesake continued.

“When you’ve got a President who only got into the White House on the strength of his name, the real powers-that-be are going to be watching him twenty-four hours a day, waiting for him to screw up. President Green screws up most days, but the problem is that for some reason, people still love him. The divorce should have killed his credibility, but it only made him more popular, so they’ve got no option left. They’re going to kill him, or at least make it look like he’s dead.”

“What do you mean ‘make it look like he’s dead’? Won’t it be a bit weird if the President gets shot and then comes back from the dead?”

“What I mean is that for all intents and purposes, he’ll be dead. No one will hear from him ever again. If they don’t kill him, they’ll probably just pack him off to a safe house in South America for the rest of his life.”

Andy paused again to take it all in. “Why are you telling me all this? When it happens, *if* it happens, what’s to stop me going to the press and telling them exactly what you’ve told me?”

“Are you suggesting the press aren’t in on all this as well? If you say anything, they’ll find you and kill you. Or worse.”

Andy thought it best not to ask his namesake to elaborate on what might be worse.

17

The plane crossed the Spanish coast without any further interference. Andy’s heart skipped a beat every time the plane made an unexpected movement but his namesake assured him *they* would not do anything to the plane while it was over land.

They continued to talk, but Andy made a point of keeping the subject as far away from his namesake's conspiracy theories as possible, telling himself there wasn't anything he could do about the situation, even if he was somehow tagging along for the ride in a plot to assassinate the President. They discussed each other's work and family lives. Andy's namesake didn't have a wife or any children and when he commented "which is good because...", intending to kick off another diatribe of cryptic non-disclosure, Andy cut him short with talk of his wife and two young daughters who he already missed and wouldn't see for at least a week. If he made it back home, of course.

At a pause in conversation, Andy's namesake couldn't help himself and Andy was left with no option but to engage him about the day's events.

"So come on," his namesake began, "you must have been scared when they took you into the room."

"Of course. When they started going through my bag I had a thousand paranoid thoughts go through my mind, like I might have left my bag unattended for a few seconds and someone had stashed a kilo of heroin in there without me noticing."

"But obviously they didn't find anything?"

"No. What's crazy is that my bag is full of computer equipment. If you open it up, it looks like the internal workings of a bomb. But what they chose to pick me up on was the fact that I had a bottle of 7UP in there that I'd totally forgotten about."

His namesake laughed. "Did they make you drink it?"

"Just a taste to make sure it wasn't toxic."

"Even if it was toxic, I bet it would have tasted better than that Duo-Cola shit they were forcing on us in the terminal. I like peanut butter but I couldn't drink half a litre of it."

Andy looked out of the window to see the Spanish coastline disappearing as the plane headed over the Mediterranean. The mood was lightening.

“So tell me, Mr. Conway, did they give you the jelly finger?”

Andy laughed, but before he could answer, the lights in the cabin cut out. Every TV screen in the back of the headrests turned black and the blue sky outside provided the only light on board. The man sitting across the aisle from them who had been tapping away at his laptop looked confused as his screen went blank. For a brief moment, there was silence on board the plane.

Then, as everyone on board realised the engines had also cut out, the plane began to dive towards the sea and the screaming began once more.

To find out what happens next go to www.scottamckenzie.com

Thank you for reading chapter one of One Day in Gitmo Nation. There are six more chapters to go, each one telling the story of a different person as they try to get to the end of the day alive.

Chapter Two: On the final day of summer camp, everything is going according to plan until men in white coats arrive to give the kids their flu shots...

Chapter Three: A broker on his final day at work suspects he is involved in insider dealing as his client begins to profit from the day's events...

Chapter Four: A woman who developed the latest flu shot discovers a terrible secret about her work...

Chapter Five: The day's events open a teenage superstar's eyes to the real world just before the final performance of her tour...

Chapter Six: It's just another day for a presidential aide until he becomes entwined in an assassination plot..

Chapter Seven: Thousands of miles away, the day's events are intricately managed by a single person. But what is the agenda?

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