

**LINWOOD
BARCLAY**

VS.

**RAYMOND
KHOURY**

AMERICA'S FAVORITE SUSPENSE AUTHORS

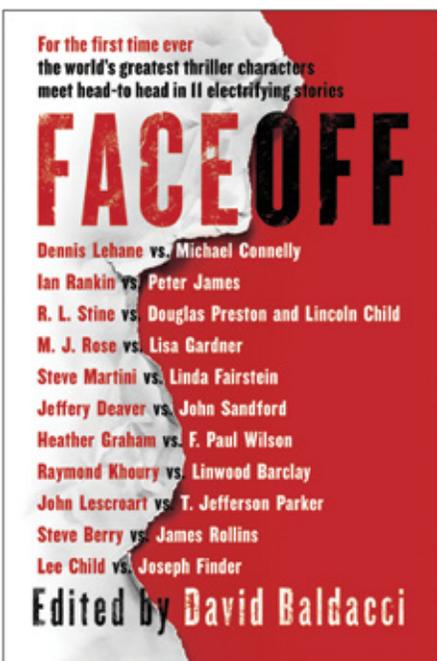


FACEOFF



ON THE RULES OF FICTION

By Anthony J. Franze
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In this series, author Anthony J. Franze interviews other suspense writers about their views on “the rules” of fiction. For the January through August editions, Anthony will profile the authors of “FaceOff,” an anthology of eleven short stories co-authored by some of the biggest names in suspense. Each month, two FaceOff authors will “face off” over the late Elmore Leonard’s famous rules of writing.

June 3 marked the release of “FaceOff,” the highly anticipated anthology in which acclaimed thriller writers teamed up to pen short stories that paired their beloved characters. Readers of this writing series know that for the past few months we’ve been doing our own face off of sorts, pitting the “FaceOff” authors against one another over Elmore Leonard’s rules of writing. This month, Linwood Barclay and Raymond Khoury—two international bestselling authors—go head-to-head.

GARBER VERSUS REILLY

Before they faced off here, Barclay and Khoury wrote “Pit Stop,” one of the short

stories in “FaceOff.” It’s an exhilarating ride that already has readers begging for a sequel.

“The story begins in the middle of a fast-moving terrorist investigation when a bad guy who has a canister of ‘something’ intersects with an ordinary guy who’s in line at a fast food place buying some chicken nuggets for his daughter,” Barclay said. The ordinary guy in line is Glen Garber, a character from Barclay’s “The Accident,” whose life takes a strange turn when he meets Khoury’s series character, FBI agent Sean Reilly.

“I thought they were a perfect mix for the story,” Barclay said. “There was the contrast of a contractor who builds houses for a living with an FBI agent on the hunt for a terrorist. At the same time, though Garber doesn’t have the training and expertise Reilly does for the threat they face, he’s the kind of guy who can handle himself; he would do what he had to do, particularly where, as in our story, his family is at stake.”

Khoury agreed, and said that the story came together so well because of the unusual approach the authors took to writing it. “Linwood wrote a great opening line that we used to kick things off. From there, he wrote a chapter and sent it to me, I added a chapter, and we went back and forth completely unscripted. We thought the approach would work well since the story itself is about the random intersection of the lives of two very different men and how their strange road trip unfolds.”

What was this great opening line that inspired the authors? You’ll have to pick up “FaceOff” to find out. For now: the writing face-off.

BARCLAY VS. KHOURY

One of Elmore Leonard’s ten rules advised writers to “avoid detailed description of characters.” Leonard pointed out that in Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants,” the only physical description of the “American and the girl with him” was that the woman “had taken off her hat and put it on the table.” Yet, Leonard said, “we see the couple and know them by their tones of voice.”

“I couldn’t agree more with Elmore,” Barclay said. “It’s just my personal preference. I hate to write descriptions of anything. I hate to describe a house, what someone is wearing, their physical description. I want to write about what people say and what people do.” The #1 bestselling author of more than a dozen novels, including his latest blockbuster, “A Tap on the Window,” added, “To draw on another Elmore Leonard rule, I try to ‘leave out the parts readers tend to skip.’ When I read a book, I sometimes skip over lengthy descriptions of how someone looks. And when I read a lengthy description, fifty pages later I tend to forget the description. My image of the character comes from what they say or what they do. For me, lengthy descriptions are not something I want to read, so it’s not something I want to write.”

Khoury entered the ring and began by noting that in a prior life he agreed with Barclay. “I started my writing career as a screen writer. In screenplays one of the rules is that you don’t get into big descriptions of characters. The reason is very practical: you don’t want to limit casting. You don’t want a studio executive or producer to feel constrained that a role can only be for a particular actor or type of actor. You want them to have wide options. Ironically enough coming from that discipline, I find that as a novelist I’m in favor of more description.”

The author of the extraordinarily successful Reilly and Tess adventures, including his latest, “Rasputin’s Shadow,” said that as a reader he has difficulty connecting with characters if he cannot visualize them. “If I can’t place them physically, it affects how I understand the character. I agree that writers shouldn’t do lengthy, boring physical descriptions (though I have done them). But things get interesting where the writer artfully uses physical description to show you something more about the character.”

To illustrate his point, Khoury identified a passage from “The Cuckoo’s Calling” by Robert Galbraith (aka JK Rowling):

Strike had the high, bulging forehead, broad nose and thick brows of a young Beethoven who had taken to boxing, an impression only heightened by the swelling and blackening eye. His thick curly hair, springy as carpet, had ensured that his many youthful nicknames had included ‘Pubehead.’ He looked older than his thirty-five years.

“You can imagine the character’s face through the Beethoven boxing imagery and also him as a child, perhaps being bullied.

That's the kind of description I want to write," Khoury said. "And to Linwood's point about forgetting what the character looks like fifty pages later, I remembered what Rowling's character looked like from that point on. And the description helped my perception of him."

"Raymond makes a persuasive case," Barclay responded. "I withdraw..."

No, he didn't actually retreat. But Barclay said that he and Khoury were really not that far apart on the rule. "What I think Elmore Leonard was getting at with his rule was that writers should be economical"—that they should avoid pointless or overlong descriptions. Writers should instead include only those details that show the reader something.

"Sometimes you need details; knowing that your character is about to come up against someone who is eight feet tall shows the reader something. But otherwise, I like to give just enough to give the reader a sense of the person." Barclay turned to cinema to make the point. He said that in *Casino Royale*, a movie based on Fleming's first Bond novel, the villain's eye would bleed. "That was great and no more description was needed." For Barclay, he always strives for an "economy of language."

"It comes from my thirty years as a journalist. The goal was always to make it as simple as possible and in fewer words. Not because readers are dumb, but because that's the best writing. I try to be as efficient as possible."

Whatever their differences on Elmore Leonard's rules, Barclay and Khoury said that the experience working on "FaceOff" was a pleasure. "I did this of course because proceeds go to the International Thriller Writers association, but I also did it because it was a chance to be part of something with so many great writers and to work with someone whose work I admire," Khoury said.

Barclay agreed, humorously noting that when he saw the "FaceOff" line-up, "I thought it must be a mistake that I'd been asked to participate." If you've ever read the work of Barclay or Khoury, you know that it was no mistake. No mistake indeed. ■

Anthony J. Franze is the author of the debut legal thriller, "The Last Justice." In addition to his writing, Anthony is a lawyer in the Appellate and Supreme Court practice of a major Washington, D.C. law firm where he has represented clients in more than thirty cases in the U.S. Supreme Court. Anthony also is an adjunct professor of law, a commentator for several news outlets, and the Managing Editor of ITW's The Big Thrill magazine. Learn more about Anthony at <http://www.anthonfranzebooks.com>.

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