

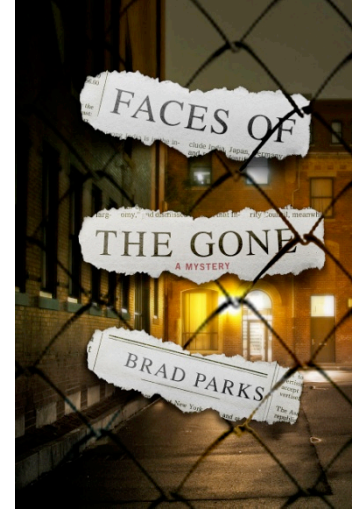


Questions and answers with

# Brad Parks

author of

# FACES OF THE GONE



(St. Martin's Press/Minotaur Books, Dec. 2009)

*Q. You clearly picked a great setting for a crime series. New Jersey seems to be leading the nation in government corruption.*

A. New Jersey really loads up a writer's toolbox with possibilities. It's one of the richest states in America and yet, in Newark, it has one of the poorest big cities. It's got every possible ethnicity, immigrant group, racial group, and religion.

And it's so crowded, all those people are forced to interact. Those intersections are where you find great stories. I mean, New Jersey just had a group of rabbis arrested for selling human organs on the black market. When reality is that strange, who's going to question your fiction?

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*Q. Your main character, Carter Ross, is an investigative newspaper reporter. You took a buyout from your job as a reporter at The (Newark, N.J.) Star-Ledger. Will Carter ever take that path?*

A. Never. Carter is the vessel for all my unrequited journalistic desires. I began writing for newspapers when I was 14 and was the youngest staff writer at *The Washington Post* by the time I was 22. I thought I was a lifer. I loved the thrill of breaking news, the rush of deadline, the satisfaction of getting the story. I still miss it. I need to keep Carter around to scratch that itch.

*Q. So where did novel-writing enter the picture?*

A. As a kid, I read mysteries and thrillers – John D. MacDonald and Mary Higgins Clark were favorites. A few years ago I started dabbling in fiction and wrote something a little more literary. But it wasn't really me. One day my agent, Jeanne Forte Dube, asked me, “What do you want to be as a writer?” I answered, “The next Harlan Coben.” And she said, “So go write a mystery.”

*Q. What specific incident from your journalism career inspired FACES OF THE GONE?*

A. I grew up in journalism as a sportswriter. I had done some investigative work, but it was mostly just fun and games in the toy department. Then I turned 30 and it was time to grow up and switch to hard news. My first assignment was a quadruple homicide in Newark. I found myself staring at blood stains in this desolate vacant lot thinking, “Why on Earth did four people die *here*?” That question turned out to be the inspiration for FACES OF THE GONE.

*Q. You continue to write for leading news publications like The Wall Street Journal. What do you like about reporting, and do you find the work crosses over into detective territory often?*

A. Reporting and detective work are very similar – it’s all about assembling pieces of a narrative until you have enough to tell the full story. And it’s your curiosity and the satisfaction in those “aha” moments that keep driving you. People are fascinating creatures and if there’s one reason I love them – and therefore love reporting – it’s because they never stop surprising me.

*Q. What about Carter. Does he ever surprise you?*

A. Carter surprises me constantly. I sound like I total nut when I say this, but I never quite know what he’s going to do. I’m not one of those writers who outlines everything. I know my characters, and they tell me where the story needs to go. Sometimes they take me to a place I never expected. At night, I end up telling my wife, “You’ll never guess what Carter did today.”

*Q. Do you think the struggles of the newspaper industry affect how Carter will be received?*

A. There are definitely times I worry booksellers are going to read my book and say, ‘Hmm, a newspaper reporter who is actually given time to do in-depth investigations? File this one under ‘historical fiction.’” But I think it’s vital to remind people why newspapers matter. A lot of our media today is either punditry or surface-level, he-said-she-said reporting. Carter is an old-school reporter who believes in finding the truth and telling it without ideology, agenda or slant. At a time when we can use a champion for real journalism, Carter Ross is a real journalism hero.

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*Q. Carter seems to enter the world of Newark’s gangs and housing projects with a certain ease, even though it’s a world very different from his WASP background. During your time as a reporter, did you find points of access into this other Newark?*

A. My friends tease me that I’m the whitest man alive and they might be right – I’m a Connecticut-bred WASP with an Ivy League degree and a predilection for sweater vests. Yet I walked the same streets Carter did and found the people I met there to be warm and welcoming. At one point in the book, Carter says this: If you approach people with respect, listen hard and genuinely try to understand their point of view, they will let you in, no matter what your background is. That was true of my time in Newark. The important thing is you can’t be afraid to discuss your differences. Our national dialogue on race is so stunted and so afraid of saying the “wrong thing” that many people – white people in particular – opt not to talk about it at all. You won’t forge an understanding if you can’t even have a conversation.

*Q. If people were to use two words to describe your book, what would you want them to be?*

A. The first word would be “authentic.” A lot of what Carter sees and hears is drawn from my own experience in Newark. I tried to capture a genuine sense of life on the streets and in the newsroom. The second word would be “entertaining.” I want this to be a fun read. I have one passage where five exotic dancers – in varying states of undress – hold a press conference for local TV news. Is it germane to the plot? Yeah. But really I just threw it in there for the laughs.

*Q. Are you as hilarious as Carter? (I’m assuming so, since you wrote his dialogue.)*

A. Only when I try to dance.

*For more questions and answers, visit the author’s Website at [bradparksbooks.com](http://bradparksbooks.com).*