

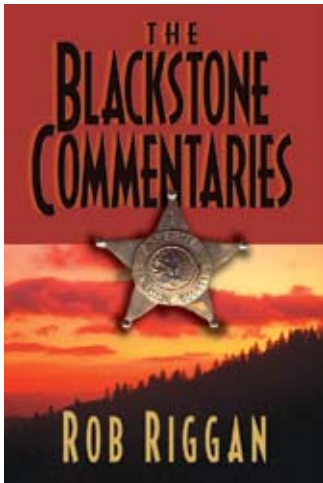


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# *The Blackstone Commentaries*

By Rob Riggan



The Carver call could have been so simple.

True, the Carvers' Monte Carlo, with Danny and Loretta and their two little girls inside, was shot and almost run off a mountain road, but no one was hurt. Blackstone County sheriff Charlie Dugan, up for re-election in the fall, knows that he could investigate just enough to please the voters, then let the matter fade away and go on with life and business as usual.

So why won't Dugan do that? Does it have something to

do with the face that Danny Carver swears he glimpsed behind the wheel of the other car?

Or does it have more to do with one rainy day, years ago, when Dugan stood outside a collapsed Alabama coal mine?

In his new novel, *The Blackstone Commentaries*, Rob Riggan follows the fallout from the Carver shooting as it sets off a chain reaction, one that leads to scandal, violence, and the downfall of a good man.

Charlie Dugan started earning the respect of Blackstone County during his third week as a deputy. A man leveled a shotgun at Dugan, but before he could pull the trigger, "Dugan picked the man up by the front of his shirt and threw him ten feet into a barn wall. People who saw it said he hit that wall almost five feet off the ground." The next morning, Dugan showed up at the man's house to explain to his wife why he had to do what he did, and to let her say anything she needed to say. "People thought that might have been braver, his doing that, than facing the shotgun."

Dugan, now finishing his third term as Blackstone's most popular sheriff ever, got the job only because of the political backing of the wild and powerful Martin Pemberton.

And Danny Carver knows he saw Pemberton driving the car that almost ran his off the road.

"The purpose of my writing the novel," Riggan says, "was twofold: to tell a good story, and to describe the loneliness attendant with moral courage." The Carver call and its consequences take hold of Charlie Dugan's soul, forcing him to relive decisions he thought he had left behind. By the end of the novel, those consequences – and their consequences – have touched the lives of the entire,

richly imagined population of Blackstone County: Charlie's wife Drusilla, aware of her own sinful past; Drusilla's niece Rachel, still grieving over the husband she lost in Vietnam even as she finds new love; young lawyer Elmore Willis, torn between the legacy of his beloved father and the lure of Pemberton; upwardly mobile mobile-home salesman Winthrop Reedy, gripped by urges he did not know he has; deputy Eddie Lambert, Dugan's right-hand man, driven away by Dugan's mounting rage.

"The Blackstone Commentaries, to me, is a microscope on the rule of law – all the ways it could work, and why it should, and how people appreciate the need and want its benefits. It is also a study in the ways law can fail and the consequences of such failures," Riggan says. "How do people like Charlie Dugan, or Danny and Loretta Carver, go on living with the realities and ambiguities of the law, power and class repression, after the shooting?"

*Rob Riggan was born and raised in New England to a family with deep roots in the South. His father was from Alabama, where Riggan still has family; Riggan's grandfather and great-uncle "used to load bottles of white lightning they'd made along the Buttahatchee River into suitcases and, boarding a train with dogs and guns, head for the Oklahoma Territory, where they would sell the whiskey to finance long hunting trips."*

*After serving as an army medic in Vietnam, Riggan covered crime and courts for a newspaper in Burke County, NC. This experience, along with his father's stories, provided the inspiration for *The Blackstone Commentaries*.*

*Riggan graduated from Haverford College and attended graduate school at Vanderbilt University. He has worked as a carpenter, pipe fitter, consultant forester, assessor, newspaper editor, part-time policeman, and full-time writer. His novel *Free Fire Zone*, based on his tour of duty in Vietnam, was published by W. W. Norton & Co. in 1984. Riggan lives in Shelburne Falls, MA.*

## ***The Blackstone Commentaries***

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