

“Lone Star”

As “Lone Star” opens, two men find a skull buried on an abandoned military firing range near the U.S. Mexican border. The search for the identity of the victim will take us back many years.

The first man we meet from the past is Sheriff Charlie Wade (Kris Kristofferson). He runs the town with an iron hand. In his world nothing is illegal so long as he is paid to look the other way. He is also a reflexively cruel and merciless man. By contrast, deputy, Buddy Deeds (Matthew McConaughey) is a straight arrow law enforcement officer. Many years later his son Sam (Chris Cooper) will follow in his father’s footsteps. It will be up to Sam to solve the mystery of who the victim was and how he met his end.

As to be expected in a Texas border town, many of the citizens hail from Mexico. Mercedes (Miriam Colon) is the owner of a highly popular Mexican restaurant. Hyper-assimilated she is always telling those around hers to “speak English”. Her daughter Pilar (Elisabeth Pena) is a school teacher and in high school she and Sam were sweethearts. Colonel Payne (Joe Morton) has recently been assigned to the nearby Army base which brings him back to the town where his estranged father Otis (Ron Canada) runs a popular watering hole for black soldiers. Along with these central characters there are host of other memorable folks you will encounter from an Indian running a forlorn roadside stand to some of the soldiers under Colonel Payne’s command.

Sam ultimately learns what happened all those years ago but we learn much more as the film explores the culture of the town and its’ people. Just a few of the many noteworthy moments in the film are:

A confrontation when Charlie comes upon a truck by the side of a lonely country road. He could care less about someone smuggling immigrants into the country. But he didn’t get a piece of the action and the retribution is swift.

A bartender, after spouting a litany of ethnic slurs, assures Sam that “he is a liberal as the next man”. Sam has a priceless response.

Sam drives into Mexico to interview a man he thinks may have information. As they are talking in a junkyard the man makes some trenchant observations about some of the differences between life in Mexico and the States. He also turns out to be a witness to a long ago murder.

The slow and hesitant way Sam and Pilar fall in love and a scene where they visit a long ago rendezvous, now an abandoned site on the outskirts of town.

Near the end of the film we meet Mercedes as a young girl crossing the river into Texas. Much later in life those memories serve her well when she has some unexpected night time visitors.

When a young black server brings Charlie a beer he sees it as an opportunity to put his racist creed into overdrive. Such is the power he wields that neither server nor the onlookers can do anything to stop an act of brutal racial humiliation.

Beautifully edited and rich in telling details, there is a lot going on in "Lone Star".

(Amazon Prime)