

STONELANDS

Written by Craig Houchin



The Border



A land of harsh beauty…











...and violent death



LOGLINE

When widowed rancher and Vietnam war vet, Robert Morrison, finds a band of migrant drug smugglers murdered on his land, a young Border Patrol Agent, Ava Leon, comes to investigate. Robert soon learns that Ava is a single mother and troubled Afghan war vet, who is still struggling to find her way home from the battlefield, and they begin a cautious and fragile father-daughter relationship that starts to bring them both back to life. But when the killers, three ex-military men hiding out with a border militia group, suspect that Ava may be onto them, they lay siege to Robert's remote ranch house and Robert, Ava, and her young son must fight for their lives — and for each other.



ROBERT MORRISON







A rancher, 70s. Hard and weathered. He has worked this harsh land for 50-years, has stood against the heat and cold and etched his mark with sweat and blood. Over the decades, he has watched waves of hopeful migrants turn into a flood of victims and refugees trying to escape cartel brutality. Through it all, he has stood steadfast like the desert mountains he loves. But now, he feels the erosion of time. The slow wearing down. The fading of his usefulness. His wife is dead. He has no children. His friends are old and few, and getting fewer. He is a Vietnam vet who has already walked the long road home from war that Ava now struggles with. He becomes a mentor and father for her and a much needed grandfather for her troubled young son. In their lives, he finds something worth living for...worth fighting for.

AVA LEON









A Mexican-American U.S. Border Patrol agent (early 30s). She works alone. Dark sunglasses hide her eyes and an armored vest covers her chest. She is a fortress with a ‘DO NOT FUCKING ENTER’ sign on her front gate. She is an Afghan war vet with a dark secret that continues to cast a heavy shadow over her life, and worse, over the life of her young son. She views trust as a weakness. A lethal frailty. She is even afraid to trust herself, and is on guard every waking hour. Always alert. Letting nothing out and nothing in. Not even love. She loves her son, Martin, but can’t risk cracking open her fortress even for him.

MARTIN LEON

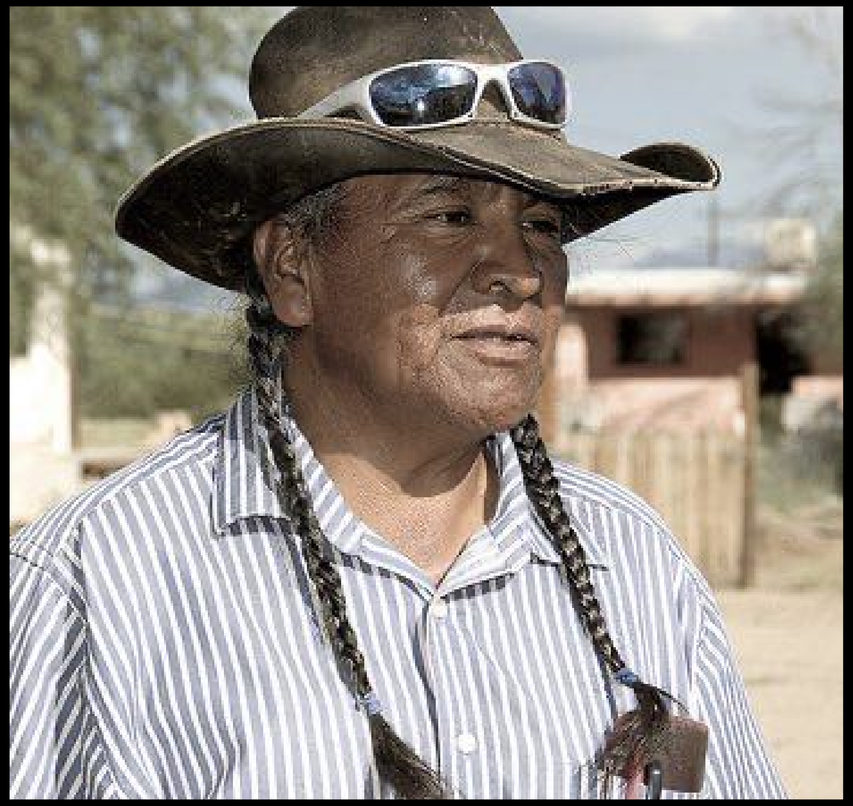






9 years old. An intuitive kid with a damaged soul. His father died in Afghanistan and his mother refuses to talk about him. He is trapped in a limbo between his fantasies about a father he never knew and the reality of living with his troubled and walled off mother.

JACOB MANUEL







Robert’s oldest and closest friend. He is a Tohono O’odham Native American and Vietnam vet. After the war, he and Robert helped each other let go of the traumas they carried and, together, they slowly found their way home.

THE KILLERS







KYLE, DAN and HECTOR (late 20s/early 30s) are Afghan war vets. Dead enders who thought they'd try their hand at robbery and turn a two week tour with a border watch militia group into a little money making scheme on the side. Kyle and Dan are brothers with a rough past. Hector is Kyle's Mexican/American war buddy. They have all struggled to find their way back into civilian life and, after following the familiar and tragic path of drinking, drugs, and petty crime, have now blundered into murder. They are amateurs. Amateurs who have just fucked up really bad. — Now they are desperate.

THE BORDER MILITIA










A rag-tag band of civilian militia, all ex-military ranging in age from 20s to 70s. They dress up like soldiers and patrol the border with loaded weapons.







SYNOPSIS

On a moonless night along the Arizona-Mexico border, seven Latino men, migrants pressed into service as drug mules, carry 60-lb packs of marijuana and heroin through the dark and rugged terrain.

Kyle, Dan, and Hector are waiting for them. It's supposed to be a simple robbery, but it turns into a bloody massacre.

After hiding their cache of stolen drugs, the killers meet up with their border militia unit, where they plan to spend the next two weeks hiding in plain sight while they "protect the border."

Robert discovers the dead migrants on a remote corner of his land. Ava comes to investigate. Their first meeting is stiff and formal and they part ways, never expecting to see one another again.



SYNOPSIS (cont.)





















But at a small town Independence Day celebration, full of flag waving and beer drinking, Robert and Ava cross paths once more when Robert sees a couple of drunk cowboys harass her. He steps in to help but is quickly knocked on his ass and can only watch as Ava takes down the two assholes by herself. But in the heat of the moment, some suppressed and uncontrollable rage switches on in Ava and, in front of everyone, including her young son, she beats the men mercilessly until Robert manages to pull her off. Shocked and embarrassed by what she's done, Ava grabs her son and runs away.









SYNOPSIS (cont.)

The next day, Ava goes to Robert's ranch to apologize. It's difficult for her but it's the right thing to do. A point of honor in the code she lives by.

As they talk, Robert recognizes the struggle within her: the struggle of a warrior trying to find her way home. He has already walked that path and their shared experience opens a doorway between them. The two loners begin a slow and guarded father-daughter relationship that brings them both back to life.





SYNOPSIS (cont.)

But as Ava and her son strengthen their bonds with Robert, the killers are coming undone. Anxious and on-edge, they begin to turn on one another.

While on patrol, they trespass on Robert's land and Kyle, their volatile leader, forces a tense confrontation with Robert and Ava that only ends when Dan and Hector convince Kyle to back down.

This encounter spooks the killers, so they make plans to gather their cache of stolen drugs and get away before it's too late. But before they can escape, their crime is discovered by their fellow militia members and a deadly shootout forces the killers onto a desperate path to cover their tracks.

A path that leads them to a siege at Robert's remote ranch house where Robert, Ava and Martin must fight for their lives.







Stonelands is a modern Western set along the dead zone of the U.S. - Mexico border. It is a story about borders. Only, not the kind we draw in the sand, but the ones we draw around ourselves to separate us from our grief, our guilt, our memory.

At its center are Robert, a Vietnam vet carrying decades of buried sorrow; Ava, an Afghan War vet and Border Patrol agent hardened by duty and isolation; and Martin, Ava's young son, who is already bending under the weight of his mother's unresolved past.

Violence has shaped these people, and yet, it is the violence of a botched robbery turned massacre in a lonely corner of the southern Arizona desert that brings their lives together for a quiet and tender, but powerful reckoning.

WRITER'S STATEMENT

Continued >>>

PTSD and the legacy of violence are the central themes in Stonelands. Robert, Ava, and Kyle, the vigilante ex-soldier whose unintended massacre sets our story in motion, are all shaped by the violence of war. Kyle channels his trauma outward, seeking control through force. Ava shuts down, walls herself off, and attempts to raise her son in a state of constant battle readiness. Robert lives with his ghosts but won't be defined by them. Each is searching for their way home from war, and each chooses a different path, some destructive, some redemptive.

The evolving bond between Robert and Ava and Martin is the film's spine. Robert is a man who thought any purpose he had was past him, but then, this troubled woman and boy come into his life and they need him—and he finds that he needs them.

This story is about how each of these people is trying to find their way home.





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