

Review of *DUSTWUN* – excerpt from the following book:

# FILMS FOR SPIRITUAL INSPIRATION

## ***1,600 Feature Films, Documentaries and Biopics from the World's Traditions***

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*Dedicated to all those exemplars, teachers and story-tellers  
speaking truth,  
nurturing love,  
healing bodies and souls,  
releasing beings from the narrow self,  
and revealing the Heart-Self of all selves,  
the Divine Life of all lives.*

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***DUSTWUN*** (2020; 1h 30m) — On one of the most pressing and controversial issues of our era, immigration, comes this tremendous indie gem with its tender emphasis on Divine Grace and our human frailty. Writer-director Genevieve Anderson, a multi-talented maker of short films that have earned many awards worldwide, in her debut feature length film worked with producer Karen Marie Hernandez and exec producer Lori Tanner to brilliantly sculpt this sublime story to illumine various aspects of the desperate migration and border security issue. “Shot over 10 days on a remote but active crossing site 30 miles north of the Mexican border,” *DUSTWUN* depicts a distraught young Latina woman, Marta (Crystal Hernandez), a devoutly Catholic undocumented migrant lost from her group, traveling through the desert into the USA. She hopes to reach a family member in San Diego, CA, who has a job waiting so Marta can earn funds for a medical operation for her 4-year-old son. She is saved from likely death by either rattlesnake bite or dehydration by Kenny (Shane Dean), an odd figure—a brawny, thick-bearded American man, an Army veteran of able body but unsound mind, suffering PTSD from his time in the Afghanistan war, harsh imprisonment, and dishonorable discharge. The acronym (and this film’s title) *DUSTWUN* means “duty status—whereabouts unknown” and refers to Kenny. In front of his makeshift compound in the Sonoran Desert, in obedience to orders from an imaginary commander, he’s built a rickety “wall” about 20 meters long out of debris in the desert. Thanks to bits of radio verbiage heard, he seems confused over the “aliens”—primarily he ruminates upon the UFO type aliens but he’s also concerned with the illegals trying to cross the border. Kenny appears to still be fixated in soldier mode on a “mission.” Ostensibly he’s put himself there to help keep out illegal migrants, but he regards Marta as a special situation. He calls her “Private,” respects her physical space, and tries to help her prepare for her mission to get where she needs. Kenny also needs to intermittently hide her, because complicating everything is the presence of two Border Patrol agents in the vicinity, “sworn to uphold an unforgiving policy.” Closest is agent Esposito (Andy Martinez Jr.), fairly new to the job, who while keeping a vigil for illegals is often on the phone with his Mexican girlfriend. Esposito is prone to prejudice and an authoritarian streak. We’ll also meet Agent Clark (Jill Remez), a middle-aged female law enforcement figure who appears even stricter, yet we’ll find her expressing real empathy and compassion. For instance, she takes Esposito to meet Kenny—fortunately while Marta is away from the compound—and Clark later has to explain to Esposito that Kenny isn’t just “crazy,” he’s a fellow human being dealing

with terrible damage to his psyche. How all this unfolds makes for riveting drama, especially Kenny and Marta's unusual friendship bond as souls in distress struggling to find safety, wholeness and well-being in an unjust, sorrowful world. Very sweet moments also occur, and moments of pure Divine Grace. Hayley Moss composed the beautifully lush, mystically subtle musical score, and Tomas Arceo adeptly lensed it—he and filmmaker Anderson included lots of close-up macro shots of insects, analogous to space aliens looking down on us little human creatures caught in our conditioning and busyness.

Writer-director Anderson has stated, "*DUSTWUN* came out of my experience living in southern Arizona near the US/Mexico border the past four years... going on rescue missions with the Samaritans (a group that gives aid to crossing migrants [and asylum seekers]), interviewing Afghanistan and Central America war veterans, extensive interviews with my step-brother, a Border Patrol agent, and extensive reading on issues surrounding immigration. We built our set on an active crossing site in Green Valley, Arizona, and used many real artifacts abandoned by migrants. We shot during monsoon season and dealt with lightning strikes, flash floods, rattlesnakes and a host of other challenges. Although nowhere near what migrants experience when crossing, I felt the reality of the environment would imprint on the story, underscoring the greater force that binds us all. *DUSTWUN* is about people connecting beyond the imaginary borders of language, walls, and laws. We are at a crossroads where understanding our interconnectedness is vital to our survival as a species. I made this film as a fable to bypass politics and expand the conversation on what matters most: compassion." At the film's website ([www.dustwunmovie.com/](http://www.dustwunmovie.com/)) she has stated, "The drive to protect our borders and preserve our national identity by keeping out the 'other' has brought to bear essential questions about the soul of our nation. *DUSTWUN* is a fictional story based on real people and real stories told in the simplest way possible to elevate what binds us together as human beings, irrespective of metaphorical, or actual, borders." Its release delayed by the Covid pandemic, *DUSTWUN* lost any promotional campaign and was missed by nearly all critics. But in 2021 it went on to win best indie film at Arizona International Film Festival, best film at Tucson's "Faith In Film" festival, and was co-winner of the best film at NY's Socially Relevant Film Festival. Rev. Rob Schenck of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Institute in Washington, DC, called this "Magical. Powerful.... A gift to humanity. The world must see this film. My God—it's a gospel for our time." Don't miss this wonderful little picture with the big heart—it's rentable at YouTube, Google Play, Apple TV and Amazon Prime.