

# South of Hope Street - Director Statement from Jane Spencer

## The Theme

My protagonist in South Of Hope Street is Denise (TANNA FREDERICK), a regular woman in the middle of her life. She is 'regular' in a sense that she represents the average American Generation X persona who quarrels with the corporate world and finds no joy in the daily uphill struggle of her lower middle-class existence. In the film I explain this *society* as a dogmatic set of rules which I display on screen with title cards that read "Order", "Cogs in a Machine", "Survival of the Fittest", "Up by Your Bootstraps", and "Luxury Resort" over a hypnotizing moving background pattern.

I clash this dogmatic 'Order' with the appearance of the 'Unknown'. In principal, the Unknown could be represented by any paradigm shifting *realization*: it could be Climate Change (which challenges our fossil energy-driven society), the discovery of gravity and our planetary system (which challenged dogmatic religions), or financial Ponzi schemes (which challenge the current economic order). However, I chose to select an abstract idea, so that my focus remains on the consequences on society & politics, rather than on the debate over thesis, empirical facts, and 'alternative facts' during the transition period of a paradigm shift. For that reason, I chose that the Unknown in my film shall be the sudden appearance of a *second moon*.

In my story the state officials make up stories about the lunar appearance that fit with the *existing* Order. This splits the society in two camps: The Majority of the people go along with the official position and carry on business as usual, ignoring the obvious, whereas a Minority challenges the 'make up explanations' and want to take things in their own hands. Since the latter disrupt the official position, they become the Pariah, and eventually are forced to go into hiding. They are the rebellion.

I believe there is something noble about this, if a rebellion happens for the 'right reasons', and yet it is often Utopian and naïve at the beginning. It is certainly a venture. Hence, I chose in the film to sympathize with the rebellion and make references to the heart-warming aspects of the Hippie movement by using original 60ies music such as Donovan, Jimmie Spheeris, and Thunderclap Newman.

The vast Majority of the people in the film, on the other hand, are holding on to their known patterns of conduct and favor populist explanations that wipe out any inconvenient truth. In my film a second moon appears, the weather turns wild, unusual earthquakes are happening, and people are losing their equilibrium. And, yet, they majority choses to deny the existence of the obvious.

The politicians are using this to their benefit. I show the state power via the face of Ltd. Daniel Winthrop (WILLIAM BALDWIN), a Sr. military officer that appears on TV as a 'trustful person' in order to manipulate public opinion on behalf of the government (a reference to Colin Powell who allowed himself to be used to justify the 2nd Iraq war). In my film the government has become a Plutocracy, a state form where a small group of people decide what is right and what is wrong.

In order to manipulate people, they use ancient *military strategies* to distract from seeing the truth: The first tactic originates from German Reichskanzler Bismarck who started a war to instrumentalize patriotism to unite his subjects (he attacked France in order to unite and form the new country Germany). In my film the nations enter a global war between USA/EU and Asia-Pacific to distract from the truth.

The second military tactic is as old as humans: *building a wall*. Humans build walls to gate their communities, build city walls and the Great Wall of China to keep the enemies out, build a wall to keep the Palestinian or Latin American out of 'their territory', build even a wall to lock Soviet citizens behind an iron curtain, etc. etc. So, in my film they also build a wall, to protect themselves from the inconvenient truth. Only my wall is the biggest wall of them all! It covers the entire crazy sky to keep the sight of the two moons out of their lives, and to preserve the old regime. The gigantism represents

the might of technology today: we have now the possibility to deny the obvious with the ultimate tools for mind manipulation: the internet.

This is how I set the *theme* of South of Hope Street. Let's look at the plot now:

### **The Plot**

Denise does not seem to have a support system, neither family nor long-term friends that could guide her through her daily quarrels. Her only ally is a disfigured man, Patrick, who conforms unconditionally to this dogmatic world in order to overcome being discriminated by his unfortunate looks. As a job-hopper, Denise has had a strain of bad luck and ended up subleasing a corner in an apartment of two self-indulgent roommates, Xenia and Universe, who uncritically 'go with the flow' and who aggressively worry about being well received in society. The pretentious roommates are obviously a makeshift for Denise, and ultimately Denise became a hanger-on.

In her precarious existential situation, Denise is being kicked out of the apartment and is desperately seeking for a new place to stay. This kicks in the Second Act in my film. On her search for a new roof over her head, Denise meets Tom (JUDD NELSON). Tom is a survivalist and philanthropist, he realizes the significance of the second moon appearance and believes that a renaissance is on its way. He wants to do the 'right thing' and call attention to it by writing 'Poems' that can change people's view on it. Denise finds him naïve but, yet, is attracted to him. They become a couple.

When Tom's patriotic nephew Andre receives a draft letter, Tom goes into hiding with Andre, and Denise suddenly loses track of them. Denise finds out that she is on a government list for her non-conformist attitude towards the Order. Her friends start to disappear. Patrick is being arrested. After moving with her two suitcases from one place to another, her old room mate Xenia, invites her back to the apartment. Denise gives up: she decides to become normal. She will now function under the 'official order' as expected.

My Third Act starts in the hide-out of the Rebellion in the mountains. The group formed around Prof. Eduardo Mele (ANGELO BOFFA), an old student friend of Ltd. Daniel Winthrop, who since became enemies. The rebellion is looking for ways to stop building the gigantic wall. They believe that by focusing energy they can end this... which they succeed with to some extent, although with little impact. The group has been infiltrated by a police informer Benjamin Flowers (MICHAEL MADSEN) who promotes terrorist activities.

Denise joins Xenia on a holiday in a Luxury Hotel Resort in the mountains. She meets the rebellious group by coincident and sympathizes with them. Eventually she finds out that Tom is also there. They reunite for a short moment of happiness, but things take a bad turn: Prof. Mele gets arrested and will be executed by Ltd. Winthrop. During the same time Andre was found by the military and mobilized. Tom & Denise's world falls apart again. Denise, desperate again, wants to deal with the 'real world' from now on ... but the real world has fallen apart in the meantime. Buildings are destroyed by earthquakes, trees have been cracked by violent storms. Denise attends the execution of her rebel friends and the action takes unexpected turns.

Overwhelmed by chaos Denise must act quickly: Should she stay with the 'old Order' or will she accept the challenge of the Unknown. Tarak (ASSER YASSIN), a pragmatist rebel, shows her the way out: She breaks a mysterious BOX. It's the same box that showed up earlier in a military compound. The box has the same hypnotizing moving pattern that I used to spell out the 'rules of the existing system' earlier in the film. When Denise destroys the box, she chooses to break with the numbing lethargy of the old truisms. She is ready for a new future, she actually takes action herself for the first time in the movie. She accepts her fate and takes off into the Unknown, not with fear or self-pity, but with a sense of satisfaction. A magic ride begins. [Jane Spencer, Oct. 1, 2023]