The silence was broken only by the droning hum of the hyperspace engines. They pulsed like a constant metronome. The sound radiated from the deep core of the ship and it gave the otherwise lifeless hull a persistent heartbeat. The vessel itself was a massive construct and a pure wonder of engineering.

Four Imperial Star Destroyers had been stitched together around a central cylindrical body creating the massive body of the exploratory vessel. The vessel resembled a sort of spiked crown, aimed upwards into the nothingness beyond. Crewed with just shy of fifty thousand souls, the hulk had been christened as *Intrepid Pilgrim.* Her destiny, the reason for her construction, was to strike out beyond the most distant systems of the Outer Rim.

The ‘Big Pill’, as she had come to be known, had been equipped with a comprehensive set of sensors. Some were tried and true designs and others were more experimental in nature. All the various scanners and data collectors served to complete the mission objectives for the Pilgrim and her brave crew. The vessel was to gather information and chart every star system along her elliptical path.

The complex astronavigation computers aboard routinely updated the vessels course with a series of micro-adjustments from reaction control systems allowing the vessel to come close to each new unnamed star. Each approach and departure consisted of a harrowing three to five minutes, wherein the *Intrepid Pilgrim* would narrowly miss the burning surface of the star gathering information and a portion of the star’s gravitational influence to further accelerate the ship.

It had been more than three months since the vessels last close approach. With each slingshot maneuver, the gap between close approaches grew longer. The regular duty compliment of the flight officers shrunk inversely with each increase. The stellar cartographers on board also found their regular work schedule declining. The time had come for the mission commander to activate the stasis protocols laid out in the mission itinerary. With fewer crew members actively working to keep the vessel’s course true, conservation of resources became a primary mission directive.

The Mission Commander’s green eyes looked tired and full of sadness, as if he bore the burdens of a thousand worlds.

“Lieutenant, it is time. Please commence Crew Hibernation Protocols. Rig the ship for energy conservation.” He said.

Massive hangar like rooms full of cryogenic hibernation pods had been built into the central core of each of the four Star Destroyers. The massive racks slowly fill with the crew, each soul locked in a frozen stasis that would preserve them against the slow creep of time. The operating officers ran through the protocol, ensuring each of that all parties were accounted, non-essential systems were set to a standby state, and that all fail safes were appropriately configured.

The number of active conscious bodies dwindled by the second until all that remained was the selected active-duty crew. Their mission was to maintain the vessel for the first five years after the hibernation protocols were established, slowly weening down the number of active members until finally the Mission Commander joined his crew in hibernation.

The first year passed smoothly, with little more than routine measurement and experimentation on passing clouds of hot and ionized hydrogen. In the same fashion, the second year passed. By the third year, the active-duty crew had grown apart. The men had begun forgoing the mission requirements to be clean shaven. Many started to have long hair to accompany their long beards. By year four, having passed the middle point of their watch, sanity returned to the crew. They prepared the vessel for the next stretch in its long coasting voyage into the unknown.

When the day finally came for the last members of the crew to join the others in their cryogenic pods, a great relief came over them. The Operations Lieutenant and the Mission Commander prepared themselves to join the others. The top officers double checked the proximity systems and activated the upkeep droids. Unlike the other crew members, these two has special pods set in the rear of the bridge. It would allow them to spring into action in the event they were needed. When the time came, they too entered their pods and entered their extended hibernation.

Two hundred and seventeen years passed in silence. The ship creaked and groaned as the stresses of travel wore on its frame. Although the *Intrepid Pilgrim* had been equipped with advanced filtration systems, the low power status of the vessel meant that the HVAC systems did not operate with the same force they did when the ship launched. A film of dust had settled over the consoles, floors, and horizontal surfaces across the vessel. The dust was only worn away in the areas where the automated service system droids passed through the corridors.

The central access corridor of Hull 1, which served as the viaduct for the small regiment of droids had a path directly down the center, marked by two pencil thin lines where the droids’ wheels had wiped away any accumulated dust. A few paths diverged, covered by thinner layers of dust, indicating that at one time the droids had taken this path to attend to a maintenance issue, but it had been long resolved. Among the many paths diverging from the central corridor, one stood out from the others. Unlike the many paths marked by the wheels of the custodian droids, one corridor had a path worn wide by something different.

The subtle buzz of a light ticked over several times before becoming a constant sound in the bridge. The Mission Commander and the Operational Lieutenant’s cryo-pods clicked open. A hiss erupted as the frozen gasses sublimated. With a cough and gasp, the green-eyed Mission commander was reanimated. He stumbled from the pod, placing his hands on his knees and expectorating the contents of his lungs onto the dust covered floor. Moments later, the Lieutenant joined him in the jolting welcome back to active life.

Once he had his bearings, the Mission Commander went to the ships console. The protocol was set so that if the ship had come into proximity with gravitational, energy, or material presences, they would have been awakened. He scanned this status board. There were no alerts, no notifications. He was confused.

“Lieutenant, status” he said.

“Coming Commander!” she said, stepping up to his side whilst wiping the spittle from her mouth with her sleeve.

“What do you make of this?” the handsome man asked.

Her eyes scanned the read out. There was no indicated reason for their revival from their frozen deep sleep. She was puzzled.

“That doesn’t make any sense.” She said, scanning the data again.

“No. It doesn’t. We need to run a full diagnostic.” He replied.

“On it.” She said, hopping over to another of the ship’s consoles.

Her fingers danced across the board as she pulled up the automated diagnostic system. The program began running. A progress bar appeared on the small screen. It ticked slowly. The full diagnostic would take time to run.

“Running the process, Commander. Expected completion time, two hours twenty-seven minutes.” She added.

“Ok. Let’s get some food.” He said.

“Good, I am starving.” she replied.

One of the side-effects of prolonged cryo-sleep was a ravenous hunger upon awakening. The trained crew had been taught how to deal with the pangs of an empty stomach until they had stabilized the situation, but eating would allow them to focus wholly on what had brought them out of hibernation. The two officers stepped into the galley, tearing open several small plasticene packages and pouring the contents into their mouths. They ate with the voracity of desert carrion feeders upon finding a fresh kill.

They discussed what could have possibly awakened them, but their primary focus was on massive caloric intake. After they felt satiated, they returned to the bridge. It happened to coincide with the completion of the ship’s full diagnostic.

They read the report together. All ships systems appeared to be working as intended. Fuel readouts were nominal. Power fluctuations had only spiked at the time of their awakening and at the regular intervals programed into the automated custodian droids. Nothing appeared out of order. It wasn’t until they read the readout of active lifeforms did they have cause for alarm.

Over a period of fifty years, the active lifeform counter ticked up and down by a count of one several thousand times. Each peak on the graph would plateau for twenty days before vanishing again. There did not seem to be any regularity to the appearances of the life form readings.

“This can’t be right. This has to be some kind of glitch. All crew members are accounted for in Cryo-sleep” the Commander said. “Run this report again.”

The lieutenant obliged. The limited analysis populated in a matter of seconds. They looked over the data again. It was exactly the same as the original report. The graph had the same bumps present, but this time they noticed they were in middle of one of the plateaus. The Active lifeform readings should have indicated two, but instead the present count indicated three.

“See if you can isolate the other life signature.” The commander ordered.

The Lieutenant punched a series of commands into the computer. The resulting information was even more puzzling. The third life sign would appear in multiple places at once, through out the entire ship. It would phase between locations, always maintaining one point active before dissolving one presence and moving on to the next.

The two crew members had spent a week tracking the patterns that the mysterious third life sign would run through. It was as if this entity was searching for something. They had debated tracking it more actively, but a deep fear sat in their guts. When they had finally mustered the courage to set a trap for the entity to investigate it, the plan was well rehearsed. They would use highly augmented blasters to subdue the entity.

The trap was ready to be sprung, they sat hidden behind bulkhead buttresses along a service corridor with their weapons at the ready. They were still unsure what they would see, even as the entity appeared at the indicated time. It appeared, twisting and phased between planes of reality right before their eyes. It took the form of every kind of living entity from the galaxy simultaneously. Yet, it also took the form of beings unlike anything they had ever seen. The shapes defied the rules of biology and physics. The beast was some unknown eldritch horror, which could not be defined by anything other than being in a constant state of flux. It moved in jerking motions, with speed that was nothing short of unnatural. It moved so quickly that at times it appeared to be moving backwards.

They nodded to each other when it was time. They raised their blasters and took their shots. The creature vanished before their eyes.

“Where did it go?” the Lieutenant asked.

“I don’t know. Stay alert, we need to get back to the bridge. We have to check the movement pattern again.” The commander said.

The two made their way through the darkened corridors of the ship back towards the bridge. As they progress towards their destination, the ship was filled with terrible screams. At times they were audible, but at other times, they could be heard in the mind but without sound. The volumes of the tortured screams shifted and fluxed just like the monster had.

They finally arrived at the bridge. The lieutenant ran the life sign diagnostic again. What she found froze her solid with fear. Instead of the pattern of dissolving and reappearing dots, every instance of the life sign appeared all at once. The screen readout was red, indicating un-authorized presences. The ships claxons began and amber colored lights filled the bridge.

Panicked, the two officers initiated the systems security protocol. The blast doors between bulkheads closed, locking them in the bridge. They continued to monitor the life sign readout. All the ship except the bridge was filled with iterations of the horrid creature. As they debated what to do, a solitary red blip appeared on the bridge with them. They turned to face it.

The horrific monstrosity charged them. In the flash of a moment, the two were torn to pieces. They looked at each other as the life left their eyes.

Horror holo-films are hard to execute. Maintaining a sense of tension without resorting to basic goreporn or an overloaded cavalcade of simple jumpscares is no easy feat. Due in part to this difficult style of film-making, horror films are often over looked for a lack of imagination. They often have the tendency to be campy and boring, they tend to lack the budgetary requirements to convey a believable story and as a result rely on cheap gags.

*Last Flight of the Intrepid Pilgrim* does none of that. I have not slept well since I watched this film.

This will be brief.

 The performances of stars Derc Kast and Jenesis Murlovs really shine. Where Kast is known for big budget action and delivering compelling dialogue, his performance in this film is elevated in the spaces between the lines. What is said and more importantly what is left unsaid shows just how much the *Rog Draft* star has evolved over the years. I expected smarmy one-liners from him which, pleasantly, never came. His intensity and on-screen chemistry with his co-star really aided this film in delivering what it selling. I cannot think of another actor that could have executed with such masterful precision what Kast delivers.

Jenesis Murlovs delivers and equally bright performance. Jenesis matches her co-star’s intensity with a fire of her own. As a pair, these two fit together perfectly. Murlovs goes beyond the limitations of her constraints of past roles to really embody the character. This performance along with shared top billing with Kast will open more paths for her in Holowood. I, for one, cannot wait to see what the future holds for her.

The direction of Minor LeDuc shows a compressive understanding of what makes something terrifying. His use of wide shot cut against tight shots really elevate the chaotic feeling, particularly in the third act. This shot style paired with a masterful sound design does wonders. The chilling soundtrack plays at exactly the right moments and the horrifying sounds produced by composer Dxuxmanz help this film at every step. The electric buzzes and creeping staccato strings will not make for easy listening outside of the film, but in situ it works perfectly.

If pressed, I could find some small foibles with this film, but I am still too creeped out to keep my mind focused on finding them.

Fear is a hard emotion to translate to film, but this film finds a way to bring up fears deep inside me that I didn’t even know were there. This film is gripping, palm-sweating, stomach-turning, mind-bending horror.

There are few films in this genre which so readily inspire the feeling of pure terror. Without a shadow of doubt, I believe this film will go down as one of the textbook examples of gothic horror for generations to come.

9.7/10 Reels

Cliko Runa

*The Fishy Critic*