

## **'I.S.S.' rushes the plot along before audience gets to know the characters**

Written by gallupsun  
Friday, 19 January 2024 10:00

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Rating: 2.5 out of 4

Running Time: 95 minutes

This film from Bleecker Street Media will be playing exclusively at theaters on Friday, Jan. 19.

Since its launch more than 25 years ago, the International Space Station has been visited by astronauts from around the world and used for various scientific studies and other educational purposes. There have been numerous books on this and other orbiting stations chronicling the incredible challenges and difficulties faced by crewmembers ... so many tales that it is surprising a narrative film hasn't been made on the subject. I.S.S. is indeed a film about such a space station, but a fictional account that ultimately falls into genre film territory.

The story begins with American researcher Dr. Kira Foster (Ariana DeBose) arriving at the title locale. She's introduced to U.S. commander Gordon Barrett (Chris Messina) and American Christian Campbell (John Gallagher Jr.), as well as Russian leader Nicholai Pulov (Costa Ronin) and his crew, Weronica Vetrov (Masha Mashkova) and scientist Alexey Pulov (Pilou Asbæk).

After a brief introduction, the political situation on Earth completely devolves. War breaks out and secret messages are sent to Barrett and Pulov by their governments. Both are told to take control of the International Space Station by any means necessary and await further instructions. It isn't long before the characters begin turning on one another and violence erupts.

The concept is interesting and, despite this being a relatively modest production, there are impressive visuals. This includes the crew floating inside the craft and, as expected, epic vistas of what appears to be a fiery catastrophe occurring on Earth. And on a lighter note, there are also a few interesting observations early on as characters talk to Foster and advise her of the

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difficulties living on a ship without any gravity. Some of the problems include sleeping issues, as well as trouble that can arise when drinking beverages.

The main conflict has a lot of potential, but the script falters in that the horrifying war is actually introduced too early in the running time. As a result, it feels as though we haven't spent enough time with Foster or the other crew members to be as empathetic with them as we should be.

Additionally, several immediately act out in blunt ways. While this behavior might be a possibility in such a scenario and one could argue that this is the point of the story, it still feels jarring and unconvincing when audiences don't know a lot of specifics about the leads.

It should be assumed that these are highly intelligent, skilled individuals. So, if they were to turn on each other, it would be tense to see them use their cunningness to try and get the upper hand. Unfortunately, it isn't long before any sneakiness and subtlety is lost. But by the time one of the individuals goes careening through the cabins seeking revenge for a partner using a power tool, the movie has veered firmly into pulp territory.

The cast are all engaging and, even if they are rushed into acting irrationally, do their best to add some gravitas to the material. There certainly is tension during some of the sequences, including an early bit that features one character suiting up and attempting to move across the exterior of the station alone in order to make a necessary repair. This is as another individual attempts to use an arm of the craft remotely to knock them into the nothingness of space.

The technical skills are impressive and I.S.S. has some moments that are entertaining in the exaggerated manner of a genre picture. The message of how people can be successfully pitted against each other by outside entities is also a fine one, but the screenplay handles it in too brusque a manner. One laments how much more powerful the film might have been if we got to know the characters better and they were less inclined to attack right from the get go. In the end, the movie provides an efficiently grim voyage, but not a mind-expanding one.

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