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DEAD SPACE 2

Developer: Visceral Games

Release Date: Out now

Platform: PC, PS3, Xbox 360, Smartphone

www.visceralgames.com



DEAD SPACE 2'S score will not disappoint – that's assuming, like the rest of the original *Dead Space*'s fan-base, you'd like another dose of spine-tingling, nerve-crunching madness – courtesy of Mr Jason Graves.

But if his music conjures this thoughtful composer as a super-scary, black leather-coated devil-worshipper in your imagination, think again. Graves comes across as a well-grounded, personable ambassador for the art of game music – a man with bags of passion and creativity who, whilst highly delighted about the success of the franchise's music, confesses it was something of a surprise.

ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES IN THE DARK

"I'd never done anything like *Dead Space* before, with all those aleatoric orchestral effects, so I knew it was different; especially when I was heading to the recording with a full orchestra for two days and nobody had heard a note of music," admits Graves.

"You can't 'mock-up' 60 string players tapping their fingernails on their soundboards. EA wanted me to create the scariest music ever heard in film, TV or games, but I wondered if it was simply too out there, too dissonant.

"I figured it was so abstract and obscure, it would float under the radar without garnering much attention. Ironically, it was those qualities that got it noticed. I knew the overall audio was good, but when the music got so much recognition I was pretty shocked."

Following such a tour-de-force, *Dead Space 2* was inevitably likely to have something of the 'difficult second album' about it – as Graves confirms: "I had learned a lot. The first game was one giant test. I had no idea if I could pull it off. The end result worked wonderfully well in the game, but I knew there were things I could do better."

Meanwhile, the bar couldn't have been set higher for myself on *Dead Space 2*, so I had three months of pre-game jitters during the planning process. How am I going to make this better, but not too different?"

Time proved an important factor for Graves, whose ideal development scenario is always to be involved as early as possible.

“The game is simultaneously the most daunting and immersive experience I've ever had. It needs to be done right.”

Jason Graves

"For a composer, perspective is hugely important. It's difficult to have proper perspective if you're doing sixty minutes of music in five weeks with the deadline looming," he says.

"Having that perspective and being able to review against the original score from the first *Dead Space* was vital. About a third way through I got into a rhythm – a confident feeling that what I was doing sounded like *Dead Space*, but also sounded new. And with the improved recording and mixing I had implemented, everything was more punchy and 'in your face'. Once I established the vibe and 'rules,' it was just a matter of working on assignments as they came in."

UNKNOWN ENTITIES

For Graves, the orchestral recording sessions, via which he harvests huge amounts of unorthodox sampled weirdness for later use

in the production, are undoubted highlights: "I would sit around for weeks, figuring out crazy ways of playing instruments so they wouldn't sound familiar. The unknown is perhaps the scariest thing you can experience, so I was trying to convey that musically by having all these instruments make sounds you don't recognise. It's mysterious; it puts you on edge. I brainstorm them, classify them and make a recording plan for lots of performance variations – loud, soft, high, low, etcetera.

"Then I go conduct the orchestra, which is a blast. It's the most fun part of the whole job. I've got 60 string players sitting there and I say, 'Okay everyone, pick up the dowels on your music stands and tap the back of the chair in front of you really quietly!'

"We do all kinds of stuff, like having everyone breathe really deeply, inhale and exhale. One of my favourite effects is when I told all 60 string players to play any note. Of course, ten people shove their hands in the air. 'I don't need you to ask questions – just play any note. I don't care if it's low or high, just play it really quietly. Ready? Go!'

"It's like the most beautiful, yet disturbing jazz chord you've ever heard in your life – magical. I take the ten to fifteen hours of recordings back to my studio, sort through them and prepare it all for potential use in the score. It's simultaneously the most daunting and immersive music experience I've ever had. I don't know – maybe I overdo it; but I feel like it needs to be done right."



Graves at work on the score in his studio



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