



## Dead Space Original Soundtrack

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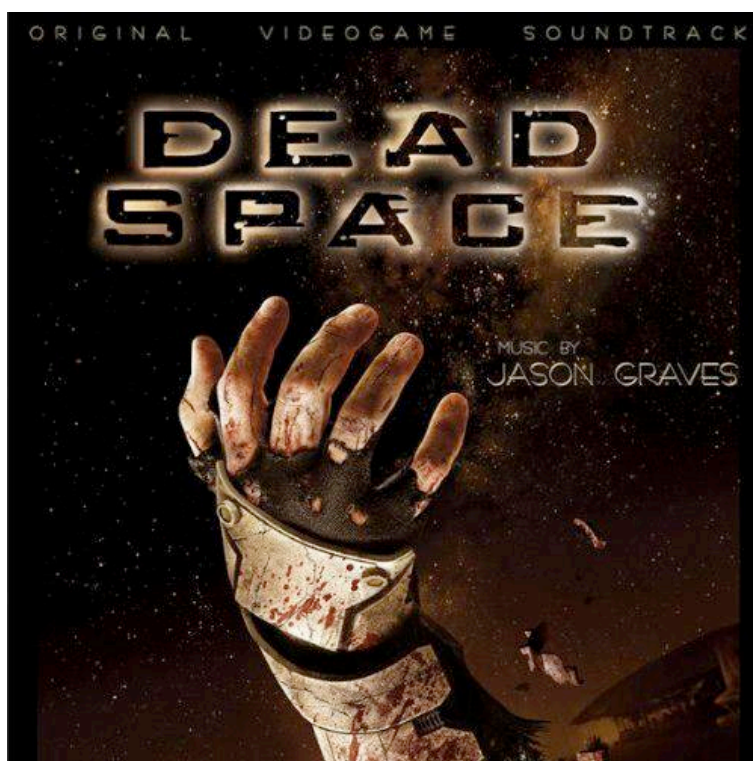
Music composed and conducted by Jason Graves.

Performed by the Northwest Sinfonia and Skywalker Symphony Orchestra. Label: EARS  
Availability: Amazon MP3, iTunes.

Electronic Arts released a new sci-fi horror game this week which features a score by award-winning composer Jason Graves. Graves has scored his share of sci-fi based video games such as *Star Trek* and has worked on several film tie-in games. The **Dead Space** score is no doubt a good prep for another upcoming release of an interactive *Alien* game.

The opening of “Welcome Aboard the U.S.G. Ishmura” starts innocently enough, though the string lines tend to shift into clusters suggesting something is just not quite right. An uneasy theme soon appears in this mostly string-based texture which sounds like a cross between Beltrami and Goldsmith (Graves studied briefly with the latter) and the brass undercurrents hint at foreboding. Soon though all gives way to a variety of aleatoric string writing with off-kilter brass writing. Graves’ use of syncopated rhythmic support helps to further unsettle the music. All of this takes place in the first track of the score which manages to create a real filmic quality to enhance gameplay.

“The Necromorphs Attack” is a visceral action cue that runs to nearly 6 minutes and is an appropriately brutal and violent piece reminiscent of the *Alien* scores of which this is a distant cousin. This particular track features what sounds like anvils pounding away in a track that has more rhythmic variety in its first two minutes than many scores have in their entirety. There is a brief moment of respite which works to build tension even more. In “The Leviathan” one can almost hear the ghost of Goldsmith sneak through in a cue that features exciting atonal sounds and a melodic idea that is quite reminiscent of *The Edge*. Impressive throughout is a complete mastery of multi-meters, asymmetrical writing and atonal music that establishes itself firmly in the midst of occasional tonal thematic ideas. Also refreshing is that there does not appear to be a drum loop in sight. The music is helped a lot on disc because there is plenty of room for these ideas to play out. That Graves finds plenty to do within this sound world is one of the things that makes the score all the more fascinating to hear.



Graves’ use of melodic content, offering a break from the atonal segments of the score, runs similar to that by Beltrami in his music for films like *Hellboy*. His scoring of horror elements is more aggressive and more in command rhythmically though and he rarely backs away from the many dissonances that occur in this score. Dissonance is not a random element either as many of the arrival points seem to be quite natural when one listens carefully. That does not mean that things jump or emphasize something that is intended to elevate tension.

Though conceived for a large orchestra, the work was evidently recorded by sections of the orchestra and features performances by both the Northwest Sinfonia and Skywalker Symphony recorded over the course of a year. This was done mostly to allow for flexible mixing for gameplay but actually helps to make the music clearer. *Dead Space* is the kind of score fans wish for in this genre. There is an intelligent musical approach to this music that understands rhythm and has tons of 20th century aleatoric technique that recall some of Goldsmith’s most visceral horror music. That Graves is able to make it all come together in music that also works dramatically is really remarkable and it never sounds like one of those cut and paste sampled scores. The score is written by someone who truly knows how to compose music for orchestra and this is on display throughout. *Dead Space* is probably one of the best video game scores of the year with heart pounding music that rivals Brian Tyler’s *AVP* score. At the very least, it is one of the most relentless and best visceral horror scores you may hear this year.

**Steven A. Kennedy**