The Final Cut: Music for Film and Electronic Media

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The Final Cut: Music for Film and Electronic Media
The Final Cut: Music for Film and Electronic Media

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Music Composition

By

Johnathon Paape
University of Arkansas
Bachelor of Arts in Music, 2010

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University of Arkansas
Abstract

This thesis contains both music scores and audio files that pertain to the scoring of music for film and video games. My thesis contains five pieces that were written for either film or video games. The scores were made using Finale 2011 and the audio tracks were created using the sequencer Reaper in combination with East West Hollywood Brass, East West Stormdrums 2 and Vienna Symphonic Orchestra virtual instruments. With these, I will demonstrate my ability to effectively compose and orchestrate music for various genres.
Thesis Duplication Release

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Johnathon Paape

Refused ___________________________________

Johnathon Paape
This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Statement of Purpose

As someone who wants one day to write music for film and video games, it seemed only appropriate that my thesis reflect my ability to competently write for these media. Instead of writing a single, large piece, however, I have composed five smaller pieces, with different emotional states. This will create a portfolio that can be used to show potential employers my compositional abilities.

The main point of this thesis was to test my ability to not only write music that was appropriate for each genre, but also to make convincing recordings of each piece using Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) and various sets of virtual instruments (VSTs).

A Digital Audio Workstation is a program that allows for the creation, recording, editing and playback of digital sounds. The DAW that was used to create each soundtrack is called Reaper. Similar to programs such as Logic or Pro-Tools, Reaper is a sequencer that can be used to record live instruments, or used as a MIDI sequencer to trigger VST samples. The VSTs used in this project were East West Hollywood Brass, East West Stormdrums 2 and Vienna Symphonic Orchestra.

DAWs are perfect for scoring for film because one can import a video clip into the program which allows the composer to accurately line up cues and get a general feel of whether or not the music they have composed works with a particular scene. They also allow you to edit many aspects of the audio, including, but not limited to, equalization, effects, volume and panning. All of these are utilized by composers to create an audio that is as realistic as possible.

For the most part though, realistic samples are not used in Hollywood films. Most big budget films have enough money to hire live performers. In this case, a composer using a DAW would create the audio “mock-up” to give the director an idea of what the music would sound
like. This saves time and money by allowing the director to have the composer change (or in some instances, scrap) the music before any real players are paid to record a piece that will not be used.

Not all films, however, have the option of using live performers. Most independent or small budget films usually do not have the money to hire live players and rely on composers who can give them close to the same sound, but at low cost. Even some big budget film or games will use digital samples if they can get the same sound for cheaper. *The Elder Scrolls: Skyrim*, composed by Jeremy Soule, is one example that comes to mind. Even though it has an entirely orchestral soundtrack, all of the sounds heard in the game were created using DAWs and VSTs.

It is necessary as a composer today to be able to work with this technology, and especially as a film and video game composer it is quite essential and useful. Being knowledgeable in this area of music technology could make the difference in your music being used in a film, or being scrapped for something else.

**The Escape**

The piece titled, “The Escape,” is based on a scene from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* titled “Hush.” In the scene, while Buffy is busy fighting off various demons, her friends are being chased by creatures that have stolen their voices. Since the scene starts out very ominously, I felt that having strings holding two high, dissonant pitches would set the mood. To keep the music from becoming stagnant, a small motive is presented in the violas and repeated in the cellos.

The overall harmony of the piece consists of keys with chromatic mediant relationships. Examples of this can be heard in music by John Williams, Hans Zimmer and Klaus Badelt. Chromatic mediants have a very striking sound and are a perfect aural representation for an action scene. Though they are not the only way to achieve intense sounding music, the sudden
shift of tonality makes for not only interesting harmony, but also can allow for interesting melodies.

The main motive of the piece starts in m. 8 in Violin I and Flutes and is based on a recurring sixteenth-note triplet pattern. The overall harmony of the first section consists only of a d minor chord for six bars before shifting to f# minor, a chord with a chromatic mediant relationship to d minor.

The following is a transition section that is imitative of Igor Stravinsky. This section underscores a section of the video where the creatures begin chasing the victims. I felt it was important to do something special here because this is the first time you see the creatures chasing people. Starting in m.18, the motive from m.12 is used (without the rising sixteenth-note triplet pattern) as the new motive. While Violin I, flutes, oboes and clarinets play the melody, Violin II, viola and cello provide a syncopated rhythm to vary the rhythmic texture.

The trumpets are used to provide motivic content, while at times also providing coloration by playing notes that are not part of the chord heard under them. The horns in m. 20 recapitulate the melody played two measures earlier, creating a call and response relationship. The piece ends with the horns and trumpets imitating the two sixteenth and eighth note pattern the basses had been playing throughout the piece.

The Pond Project

In the summer of 2012, I was contacted by Taylor Yust, a student at the University of Arkansas, who was looking to add music to a video game he was designing. It was a game for cell phones called “Pond.” “Pond” is a game in which the player takes responsibility for maintaining a virtual pond. To do so, the player must eliminate different creatures as they enter

The Pond Project

In the summer of 2012, I was contacted by Taylor Yust, a student at the University of Arkansas, who was looking to add music to a video game he was designing. It was a game for cell phones called “Pond.” “Pond” is a game in which the player takes responsibility for maintaining a virtual pond. To do so, the player must eliminate different creatures as they enter
the pond by tapping on them. If this is not done effectively, the pond will slowly become more contaminated, and eventually become unusable, in which case, the player loses. Taylor was looking for some tranquil music that would fit the idea of the game. For this project, I wrote two full pieces, “Pond” and “Dia Perfeito,” and music for the gameplay, that is not a piece per se, but a collection of randomized sounds that I have dubbed “Pond Gameplay.” The reason that I chose to write the music for his game was to learn what was different when writing for a game as opposed to a film.

One of the biggest differences between composing for film and for video games is that some games, such as “Pond,” do not have a fixed video duration. This means that one scene or level could last eight seconds, ten minutes, or never change. The difficulty here is to create interesting music that will have the ability to loop. Because of this, pieces will need to either end in such a way that the loop unnoticeable or pleasing transition to the ear, or be minimalistic to the point that where it loops would not matter.

**Pond Title Screen**

“Pond” was the first track I wrote for the project. I used as few instruments as I could for the purposes of making the track sound tranquil. The main instruments used are harp, flute, oboe and clarinet. The strings are used to fill out the sound and to fill in the harmony. The overall form of the piece is AABA. The piece starts in E major with flute and harp, the melody being in the flute. In m.5 the flute plays the melody again, this time with strings added. In m.9, the melody is played again by the flute, but this time with the clarinet a third lower.

At m. 19, the melody returns, only this time in the oboe part and without any support from the strings. The flute remains to play a counter melody against the oboe. This is to add a bit
of complexity to what has been, thus far, a very simple harmony and melody. Measure 27 marks the beginning of the B section.

To start the B section, the flute is given a new melody, with harp and string support. I wanted the B section to sound distinctly different from the A section so the key was changed to G Lydian to employ a modal sound. The clarinet here has a very important part. Its job is to provide sounds imitative of real life sounds. In m.27, it plays a high B to G figure and in m.30 the clarinet has two trilled notes. These are used to imitate the sound of a bird call, something one might expect to hear at a pond.

After this, the A section is repeated in the original key of E (via common chord modulation). In m. 39, the melody is heard in harmony between the flute and clarinet, but instead of completing the melody, the harmony shifts a chromatic mediant higher (to G) and initiates a falling melody, with the piece ending a measure later on a B chord (another chromatic mediant shift) which will act as a V-I resolution if and when the music is repeated.

**Pond Gameplay**

This was the hardest aspect of the project to deal with because of the nature of the game. The entire game takes place on one level, a pond. It is the player's objective to keep the pond clean for as long as possible by defeating various creatures that are infecting the pond. As the pond loses health, the player must remove the creatures from the pond by tapping the screen in order to stay alive. The only thing that changes in the game is the difficulty of the enemies, which makes it harder for the player to keep the pond healthy. This means that representing the pond's health musically is important as it keeps the player alert to his or her pond's status. For this section of the game, looping is essential.
The overall piece is very minimalistic in nature. Five parts are layered separately, but can be added to one another in a random time sequence. Each layer is in a world of its own and is activated when the player reaches a certain health level. First, we have the piano simply playing two chords, an A to a D. Until we get to layer five, the piano is the primary musical element.

When the player's health drops below a pre-set number, layer two comes in. Layer two consists of another piano playing all of the notes not found in the key of A, to give the player the sense of unease. The interesting thing, though, is that they could happen in any order. One of the features of the program used to build the game is randomization of sounds. To break any monotony and keep the file size small, the piano notes were broken into individual parts and put in separately in the game. This allowed the program to play the notes in any order.

A wind chime is used for layer three to add not only a bit more uneasiness (most of the notes are outside the key of A) but at the same time a bit of tranquility. The wind chimes are the most natural sounding instrument heard. They give the illusion that you are actually sitting near a pond with the wind blowing.

Layer four consists of pizzicato celli. They play primarily in the lower range, going from low note to high note to imitate the sound of drowning. This is so the player becomes aware that they are close to losing the game. Also, by adding a different timbre to the mix that is harsher than the others, the players may become more panicked by the sudden lack of tranquility.

The final layer is composed of a multitude of pizzicato violins in the middle to high range. Since at this point the player would be very close to losing the game, the gentle piano cuts out while the agitated violins are heard. This should cause the player to panic due to the harsh nature of the sounds, possibly making it harder to reestablish his or her concentration.
Pond Credits- “Dia Perfeito”

This piece is the final part of the game and will be heard during the credits. “Dia Perfeito” means “perfect day” and is directly related to the opening piece “Pond.” To keep continuity, the melody is the same as “Pond,” however, the harmony was re-worked to fit the style of a bossa nova. A bossa nova is an evolved form of a samba, but with no dance steps. Bossa nova literally means “new trend.” Examples of bossa novas are pieces such as “The Girl from Ipanema,” and “Desafinado” by Antonio Carlos Jobim. The instruments of choice here are a typical bossa combination: guitar, bass and piano. To provide a more relaxing feel, a recording of the ocean has been added to the soundtrack.

The harmony starting from the beginning is very similar to the opening of “Pond,” however, all of the chords used are seventh chords. The rhythm has also been changed to a typical bossa style rhythm. The melody is exactly the same melody used in “Pond,” but here starting with piano, and later moving to the guitar.

The guitar is used as the primary rhythm instrument and keeps a syncopated rhythm against the bass to accentuate the bossa feel. In m.19, the guitar takes the melody, but with a few ornamentations added. This continues until m. 27 where the piano comes back in with the B theme. The guitar gives a back-beat to the rhythm at m.27 to differentiate the rhythm of the B section from that of the A section.

I believe that a bossa style song for the ending is very appropriate. It has a very, “hope you come back” mood to it. Hopefully, regardless of whether the player failed or succeeded, they will feel more welcome to play the game again.
Close Pursuit

Close pursuit was by far the hardest piece to finish. Not only is it the longest piece of my thesis, but it contains the most sections and themes of all the other pieces. “Close Pursuit” is based on the opening chase scene from the James Bond movie “Casino Royale.” Since the scene starts immediately with Bond's accomplice chasing the target, the music starts off very intensely.

To create a tribal music quality, bongos, as well as other percussion, are introduced early on. Harmonically, the piece starts with an octatonic tetrachord that shifts further up the octatonic scale every time it is heard. The quality of the scale helps create a sense of tension and suspense. This tension increases until m.11, when Bond himself joins the chase.

Once Bond joins the chase, a 016 trichord becomes the basis for the harmony. This provides the scene with a sense of grittiness. It also sets up future sections with the ability to shift easily to D minor by centering the trichord around D.

In m.19, the rhythm changes drastically from constant eighth notes to sparse orchestral hits. This coincides with a scene shift in the film from Bond chasing the target in the city, to both of them running through the jungle. This is very common in film scoring. Often the rhythmic pulse, or even harmonic nature of the music, is changed to represent a shift in angle or a change in scenery. Another technique employed here is the use of multiple metric shifts. To make certain cues line up in a film it is sometimes necessary to change the number of beats in a measure.

In m.27, the mood drastically changes from exciting to static. This is the point where Bond temporarily stops chasing his target to think of a more efficient way to catch him. Right before the chase recommences, there is a sixteenth-note flurry of cluster chords in the trumpets. This signals the restart of the chase. At m.35, another rest section appears when the target stops to frantically search for Bond. Since I used more low tones during the last break, I thought that
using higher sustained tones with disconnected hits would better represent the target’s sense of panic.

In m.41, Bond makes a big entrance with a bulldozer and a more prominent harmony is called for. I recycled part of the octatonic scale I used from the beginning to create an E(b5) chord. From here, I use a series of inverted chords to create a walking bass line which allow the eventual change to Db minor to not sound so abrupt. Once we get to m.47, we are successfully in Db minor.

The next section starts in m.73 and is in 7/4 time (3+4). The melody here starts in the french horn and is a manipulation of the melody heard at m.41. The difference being that this melody continues to rise where the other stopped after only four measures. Once the melody has been fully played by the horns, the trumpets join in an octave higher and the first violins two octaves higher. At this point, Bond is closing in on the target and is ascending a building under construction. The added octaves add a sense of heightened danger and action to the scene. All of the musical buildup to this point is released at m.84 with a grand 016 trichord buildup.

Once the trichord is released, the next section begins in F minor and is back in 4/4 time. This is to reflect a musical difference when the camera angle changes and Bond has all but cornered his target. The harmony consists of all minor chords, with a few chromatic mediants, to keep the intensity even in a slower tempo. In m.102, the melody is smoothly transitioned into a crescendo that is essentially a rising Eb natural minor scale. This is not because the section is in Eb minor, but is rather a result of the chromatic mediant shift from C minor to Ab minor. The harmonic shift forces the melody to shift with it while it is rising, creating the scale.

The rising scale leads us to a section of orchestral hits. These hits line up with a part of the scene where the target is frantically searching for Bond. The hits help to build suspense and
to foreshadow that the target will find Bond, but things will probably not go as he planned. The scene ends on a Bb, Eb, E trichord. This 016 trichord provides enough dissonance to create unease and allowed the piece to end the same way it began.

**Till Tomorrow's First Light**

I wrote this piece to evoke a sense of “Americana,” similar perhaps to John Williams’ score to *Lincoln*. My influences when writing this piece were Copland’s “Fanfare for the Common Man,” “Quiet City,” as well as John Williams. The opening melodic line in the clarinets mostly consists of fourths and fifths, very common intervals in the music of Copland.

The main melody of the piece is introduced in m.22, but more interesting than the melody is the harmony used throughout the piece. Part of what makes Copland's sound unique is not only the very open sounding intervals he uses, but also, the use of borrowed chords and added tone chords. I employ a very pan-diatonic sound with the use of added tone chords and step-wise movement giving the piece a flowing-like quality.

**Dark Ascension**

“Dark Ascension” was by far my favorite piece to work on. I have never tried to incorporate electronic sounds into any of my pieces before, so getting the chance to do so was a thrill. Although I did not have a particular scene to work with, I tried to imagine a sci-fi scene such as one from *Aliens*. The point was to create a piece with a dark, other-worldly mood.

Various effects are used to create a dark setting. Violas use tremolo cluster chords to create a sense of unease, while violins use harmonics. In the electronics, a pounding sound can be heard throughout most of the track. This is done purposefully so the listener will imagine that something evil is trying to enter, or possibly trying to escape from its prison.

The only harmonies used are ones with chromatic or double chromatic mediant
relationships, when there is any harmony at all. My favorite passage of the piece occurs in m.25, where a screeching, terrifying barrage of sound happens. I was influenced by Krzysztof Penderecki’s “Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima.” Penderecki’s use of various extended techniques and screaming string parts were a perfect sound for what I was looking to accomplish.

Right after the “threnody” section, a calm, yet ominous sound is heard from the horns and low brass. The harmony here, also consisting mostly of chromatic mediants until the second-to-last chord, is G# minor, which is resolved down a half-step in the outer voices only, allowing it to flow into G major.
## Instrumentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Escape</th>
<th>Close Pursuit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Flutes</td>
<td>Piccolo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oboe</td>
<td>Oboe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Clarinets in Bb</td>
<td>3 Clarinets in Bb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass Clarinet</td>
<td>Bassoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bassoon</td>
<td>3 Trumpets in Bb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrabassoon</td>
<td>2 Trombones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Horns in F</td>
<td>Bass Trombone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Trumpets in Bb</td>
<td>2 Horns in F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Trombones</td>
<td>Xylophone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass Trombone</td>
<td>Timpani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td>Percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timpani</td>
<td>Bass Drum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percussion</td>
<td>Crash Cymbal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suspended Cymbal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violins I</td>
<td>Suspended Cymbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violins II</td>
<td>Snare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violas</td>
<td>Violins I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celli</td>
<td>Violins II</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bassi</td>
<td>Violas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Celli</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bassi</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Till Tomorrow’s First Light</th>
<th>Dark Ascension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Flutes</td>
<td>3 Electric Keyboards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oboe</td>
<td>(With EW:Stormdrums2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Clarinets in Bb</td>
<td>Horn in F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bassoon</td>
<td>2 Trombones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Horns in F</td>
<td>Bass Trombone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trumpet in Bb</td>
<td>Tuba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Trombones</td>
<td>Percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass Trombone</td>
<td>Crash Cymbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td>Suspended Cymbal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timpani</td>
<td>Bass Drum</td>
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<td>Percussion</td>
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<td>Crash Cymbal</td>
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<td>Suspended Cymbal</td>
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<td>Snare</td>
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<td>Violins I</td>
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<td>Violins II</td>
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<td>Violas</td>
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<td>Celli</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bassi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pond Title Screen
Flute
Oboe
Clarinet in Bb
Harp
Violin I (Solo)
Violin II (Solo)
Viola (Solo)
Cello (Solo)

Pond Gameplay
2 Pianos
Wind Chimes
Violins
Celli
Dia Perfeito
2 Guitars
Piano
Bass
The Escape

Ominously

\( \frac{\text{\textbullet}}{120} \)

2 Flutes

Oboe

2 Clarinets in B♭

Bass Clarinet

2 Bassoons

Contrabassoon

2 Horns in F

3 Trumpets in B♭

3 Trombones

Bass Trombone

Tuba

Timpani

Percussion

(Sus. Cymbal,
Crash Cymbal)

Violins I

\text{mp}

Violins II

\text{mp}

Violas

\text{mf}

Celli

\text{mf}

Bassi
With Intensity

Fls.

Ob.

B-Cl.

B. Cl.

Bsns.

C. Bn.

Hns.

Tbn. 1&2

B. Tbn.

Tuba

Timp.

Perc.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Bs
Tbn. 1&2

Vln. II

Bn.

B. Cl.

Hns.

B. Tpt. 1

Tpt. 1

C. Bn.

Bsns.

Flts.

Vla.

Vc.

Bs
Pond

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Dia Perfieto

Bossa Nova

\[ \text{Guitar 1} \]

\[ \text{Guitar 2} \]

\[ \text{Piano} \]

\[ \text{Bass} \]

\[ \text{Gtr. 1} \]

\[ \text{Pno.} \]

\[ \text{Bass} \]

\[ \text{Dia Perfieto} \]
Pcl/Ob
Cl's
Bsn

Trp
Tbns
Hn

Xyl
Tmp
Per

Sn

Vln.
Vln I&II
Vla
Vcl/Bs
Score

Till Tomorrow's First Light

$\underline{\text{Gently}}$

2 Flutes

Oboe

2 Clarinets in Bb

Bassoon

2 Horns in F

Trumpet in Bb

3 Trombones

Tuba

Snare

Cymbals
   (Crash, Medium Sus.)

Timpani

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Celli

Bassi

$\begin{array}{c}
\text{q=96} \\
\text{Gently}
\end{array}$
Majestically

Fls

Ob

Cls.

Bsn

Hns

Tbns

Tba

Cmb

Tmp

Vln 1

Vln. 2

Vla

Vcls

Bsi
1st Violins glissando and/or tremolo on any notes between C6 and C7

2nd Violins will play the notes listed on the staff as harmonics and glissando one whole step above and below the note chosen.
### Appendix

#### Compact Disk Track Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Track</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Track 1</td>
<td>The Escape</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>1:03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 2</td>
<td>Pond Title</td>
<td>Video Game</td>
<td>1:49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 3</td>
<td>Pond Gameplay</td>
<td>Video Game</td>
<td>1:51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 4</td>
<td>Dia Perfieto</td>
<td>Video Game</td>
<td>1:33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 5</td>
<td>Close Pursuit</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>3:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 6</td>
<td>Till Tomorrow's First Light</td>
<td>Americana</td>
<td>2:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 7</td>
<td>Dark Ascension</td>
<td>Sci-fi Horror</td>
<td>1:50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>