

The Galaxy's Edge:

**An Adapted Narration of Scenes from Joseph Conrad's Novella
*Heart of Darkness***

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The Honors Program

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The Galaxy's Edge: An Adapted Narration of Scenes from Joseph Conrad's Novella *Heart of Darkness*

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Music is a universal language. It helps people from across the world connect and communicate through emotions and sounds. When you combine music with storytelling, music adds an additional dimension that is unmatched by any other form of art. It enhances the storytelling, helps guide the audience into their emotions, and makes them care and invest in the characters who are involved within the story. This artistic project was completed to showcase the power of music and how it enhances a story through artistic expression from a composer. It takes a classic tale, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and makes a creative adaptation that puts the audience in a space adventure set in 2399. Accompanied by a hand-crafted score produced by Andrew Weaver and composed by Ian Mann, the music is the central aspect that guides the audience through the story and invites them to discover hidden aspects of the work through these musical choices.

Introduction:

Motion pictures, a new art form which developed in the last century, has become an integral element of culture within our world. Since its first appearance, films have divided countries, brought peace among religious groups, and educated the public about historical events or social issues. Considered one of the most essential components of a film for the way it emphasizes the film's message to the audience, music has played a pivotal role in influencing the culture of the past century. For example, in the 2018 release *Black Panther*, Kendrick Lamar introduced the use of hip-hop music in a mainstream soundtrack to address social justice issues, thus earning him a Pulitzer Prize for his work and social messages. This also dates back even farther to some of the earliest film scores such as Maurice Jarre's *Lawrence of Arabia* soundtrack that helped educate the audience about the emotional trauma present within T.E. Lawrence's mind. Jarre's score also helped invite the audience into the Arabian Desert, the unfamiliar landscape Lawrence traveled across to secure a win for the British in World War I. This brief introduction to my thesis will examine the functions of film music and the methods used in film scoring to enhance a film's message, the characters, and engage the audience in a well-written story.

The practice of using music to accompany narratives can be traced back centuries to the Greeks, who used music in drama and in performances of tragedy. Since that time, music in dramas, most recently in film, has helped the audience identify climax, tension, sadness and other emotions (Prendergast 3). One method used to help the audience interact with the story is by the development of musical themes that are instantly associated with a movie, as is the case with *Star Wars* or *Lord of the Rings*. While the main purpose of a composition in film or TV is to

evoke an emotional response from the audience, themes help identify characters, the setting, or the musical background of the story. Whether or not the audience can comprehend the composer's intentions behind their compositions, it should help to create a variety of emotions: tension, anger, sadness, happiness, passion or even a range of other subconscious responses which complement the story. The music within a film is used as a guide to the story's progression, but it also allows the audience to dive deeper into a character's motives and personality.

Before the 1950s, many film companies would go to music libraries, which were companies which composed and recorded pre-packaged music that could be put in a lower budget film. To make it easier for the directors, recordings would be listed in library-like sections by theme, such as "happy song" or "sad song" and then placed within the silent films. Directors would later develop the film score by having musicians play these musical cues or leitmotifs to inform the audience of a villain or hero (Prendergast 6), encouraging a feeling about specific characters within the film. Larry Timm said it best when he stated: "music is used to create 'unspoken' thoughts of a character or unseen implications of a situation" (Green 83). Besides simply using these leitmotifs to send subliminal messages to the audience, directors also use this music to convey their thoughts and themes throughout the film. A great example is how the film *Black Panther*, at the start, associates the main villain with hip-hop music and the hero with classical African drums, combining the two together at the end to convey the director's message that both the villain and hero must learn from each other. They have learned the necessity of opening up their resources to the world while also protecting their way of life.

In addition to conveying emotion and emphasizing the director's messages, an effective musical score also helps people identify which characters to root for. Similar to how costume

designers have to make the villain look like a villain instead of a superhero, the music usually conveys who the villain is and who the superhero is (Green 89). More recently, film scoring has been adapted to allow for more plot twists in a storyline by making characters' themes evolve throughout the film; however, most film scores usually have a villain and a hero's theme. This may sound like it makes the film too easy to understand; however, this style of scoring can also demonstrate an evolution over time. For example, through a trilogy of films, the main character's theme can expand into more complex ideas or involve new instruments to show that the character is maturing or falling apart as their storyline continues.

Modern scoring is continuing to evolve this medium for connecting with audiences. We have seen firsthand the onset of streaming services and other various forms of media like podcasting and video games that contain highly intricate and sophisticated soundtracks as well. Gordy Haab said it perfectly regarding video game soundtracks stating “[j]ust 20 years ago video game music might be described as primitive electronic ‘beeps’ and ‘blips’. But now it's not uncommon for a video game to have multiple hours of music[,] all recorded with a full symphony orchestra and choir” (Haab).

Heart of Darkness Analysis

Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* follows the journey of a curious sailor, Marlow, who travels to the Congo during the colonization of Africa. When Marlow hears word of a mysterious European leader named Kurtz who is stuck in the heart of the Congo, he embarks on a journey to find this man to learn from his idealistic abilities. This book depicts how we all have a primitive, innate desire. It examines the conflict of imperialism in the 19th-century. While written in 1899, the results of imperialism and colonization can still be seen today through power

disputes between governments and private corporations in Africa. Likely my favorite story I have ever read, *Heart of Darkness* can be adapted, I believe, to multiple settings and still provide the same message as the original story. *Apocalypse Now* is a great example of this where the directors adapted the 19th-century classic to the Vietnam War. It took a creative spirit to manifest this book-to-film adaptation and I want to do a similar project by developing musical scores which reflect my understanding of the themes behind this tale and how they would be represented in a futuristic adaptation.

The first theme present from the beginning of this novella is the dark presence of Imperialism. In the 19th century, governments would commission companies to go to the Congo and scavenge its resources. Conrad went on a journey down the Congo River of Africa and witnessed this firsthand, which was why he decided to write this book. When we flash forward to today, we see that this continues to be an ongoing issue where companies will build factories in third world countries and employ local workers at low wages in terrible conditions to mass produce goods. As represented in my narrative, if we begin to colonize other planets and there is life out there, we will see opposition from the natives and then Earth's governments will likely create coalitions with private military companies to begin the process for clearing out an area for our people to inhabit. Based on Conrad's novella, I explored this in two of my scenes (the first and third act). This dichotomy between civilized and barbarous should be analyzed and I want to use my musical experience to express this.

The second theme that I am most passionate about from this book is the madness that is present in Kurtz, known from his iconic line, "The Horror! The Horror!" When I first read this book, I was stunned to read such a moving text. I did not realize how most of the aspects of civilization surrounding us is merely a façade. We can quickly withdraw to a primitive self that

is innately within everyone. It only takes the entrapment of isolation to introduce madness in our lives. In the novel, a great example of this is the Congo, when the deeper Marlow travels, the more tempted he is to ignore his civilized life and become more primitive in his lifestyle. When I adapt this to my futuristic setting, I think of space and Mysterion's changing ecosystems like the Congo. Mirroring this, outer space is a dark, empty, and unforgiving ecosystem where the crew travels to land on Mysterion. The environment continues to change on the planet Mysterion as well moving from a village to a hot, isolated desert and finally ending on top of a mountain separated from the rest of the world.

The Creative Process:

When this journey began, my ideas was simply to showcase how powerful a soundtrack can be when used in media. In my artist studio classes, I continued to learn about creativity and how influential art is to society. During this time, my artistic project slowly began to shift to be less academic-focused and centered more around my desire to be creative and embrace what I have learned in class.

This, through a long discussion over a few days with my colleague, led me to create the idea of making short compositions that highlight the themes of one of my favorite books of all time *Heart of Darkness*. I was going to work behind the scenes composing, producing, directing, and mixing the entire project. I was so excited, however, there was still one a major problem that I was unable to fix. I had absolutely zero experience in composing. My only 'background' to be a composer was taking some music theory courses along with my instrumental experience as a trumpet and piano player. Thankfully, one strength I did have was a diverse background in soundtracks through my own research and talking with composers as well. I have had extensive

conversations with many composers, conducted research on many different films myself along with lectures at Belmont. As described later in this section, I was able to sit down with *Star Wars* video game composer Gordy Haab along with GRAMMY-nominated and BAFTA-winning composer Austin Wintory. To prepare for creating through a non-visual medium, I listened to iconic radio shows such as *The Lone Ranger*, *Abbott & Costello* along with Podcasts such as *Score: The Podcast* and *Blockbuster* which highlighted the musical genius of John Williams for helping create powerful films with Steven Spielberg and George Lucas. With my contacts and research, along with the wide knowledge of how soundtracks have influenced their respective mediums, I felt confident I could achieve a project where I had the creative control of the soundtrack.

Around February 2019, I was asking around to see who the best fit to help me with my Honors project would be. Initially, I thought that I wanted someone who was able to help me make this formal paper and fix grammatical errors where seen. When I sat down with Dr. Boan, the head of the Honors Artist Studio, he informed me that I should find someone whom I can learn and grow in my composing skills. He recommended a few professors from the composition department, and I decided ultimately to reach out to two professors. One was unavailable, and the other was very quick to respond. My honors director, Keith Mason, sat down with me and quickly helped me begin to gain confidence in this project. He gave the idea, to both academically and creatively fulfill my goals, by making a project that is like a radio show that highlights the music to effectively shape the narrative that I am writing. With a strong background in writing, I thought that this would be a fun task to work on my creative writing skill along with finally getting to produce a soundtrack for my narrative.

The conversation resulted in another realization when he recommended that I find someone else to be the composer for my project. He said that while it would be fun to work on this project myself, collaboration is key on these projects, and it would be too much for me to handle alone. He gave me a few people to talk to, and I decided to click with the first one on the list as I knew him from a fellow colleague. His name was Ian Mann.

Keith Mason had informed me that Ian had been doing some incredible work with his classes and would be a great candidate for this project. Through this, I decided to meet with him and discuss the potential of working together on this project. He was immediately hooked on the concept, given enough time, and showed me a few of his works that he had worked. When he unveiled his working cover of “The Avenger’s” theme to me, I realized this composer was extremely talented and had a bright career, so I wanted to have him join my team to help me with this creative product.

After I had my prospectus approved to create my project, I completed the first major step towards creating my artistic product. However, after the approval in April, I did not look at it much except for conducting research and constructing a list of relevant content to inspire my script and soundtrack for my project. I had initially planned on taking the summer to begin writing my script and my research paper. That rarely happened though as I got preoccupied with an unexpected surgery, campus orientation activities, travel plans, and catching up for the work that I had missed during those times. It was a much busier summer than I had anticipated, yet there was still downtime to sit down with Ian to begin our vision for this project. From this, I’ve learned that the relationship between the producer and composer is essential because they need to understand how they communicate with each other. Besides my conversations with him, I also gained experience in my job as a music supervisor, met with many people in the music

community who are working in soundtrack recording and was able to attend my first soundtrack recording session through my GRAMMYU mentor, Steve Schnur. I was able to understand firsthand how everyone works behind the scenes to create this session that eventually gets turned into a complete soundtrack for a video game, film or TV series.

Continuing into the fall, my real work began while I was living in Los Angeles, the heart of the film music community. Due to the convenient location, I tried to connect and learn from as many people in this industry as I could. Like I said, I was fortunate enough to meet with GRAMMY-nominated composer Austin Wintory who provided a lot of inspiration for what would become the final product of my creative script. He explained the purpose of composing a soundtrack to media, along with portraying how one example, *The Mandalorian*, uses music to create a 'western' soundtrack to help develop a character who says almost nothing, and the music dictates his emotions (Wintory). This two-hour conversation is what inspired me to create my script as it was a focus on a space exploration, along with a native, tribal instrumentation towards the end which was similar to the instrumentation used in *The Mandalorian*.

I continued to meet with others out there as well: music supervisors; sync licensors; composers; contractors; orchestrators; musicians; and more. It reinvigorated me to creatively write my script for my honors project. Through this creative process, I was continually in touch with my composer, informing him of the discussions I had with those that I met in Los Angeles. It helped me continue to guide regarding instrumentation and instructing him to watch certain films or TV shows to understand my vision like *Apocalypse Now*, *The Mandalorian*, and *Ad Astra*.

During my time out in Los Angeles, I was also able to pursue an internship with the video game company, Electronic Arts, obtaining hands-on experience in assisting with the creation of

four soundtracks for their launch season in the fall of 2019. I had many tasks as an intern, but I was able to learn how they produce these soundtracks and how to give feedback to the composers in a timely manner which helped me in learning how to talk like a businessman and a creative within the music industry.

After I completed my semester in Los Angeles, I focused my time on finishing my script. After my conversation with Austin Wintory, I did not have difficulty creatively writing anymore. The hardest part of writing my script was actually finding a set five-hour block where I could creatively write it. Work, friends, school, and club activities continued to get in the way when I should have been focusing on completing my project.

According to my initial timeline, I had planned to complete my research by December and have the rough draft script written to share for feedback in review by January 1st, but this was not possible given my other activities. The first completed draft was not completed until the first week of February. I was also informed in mid-January that our thesis had to be submitted by mid-March considering that we needed to give our thesis directors an ample amount of time to go through our work and give us feedback before the final submission on April 20th.

I adjusted my timeline every single week since they were always changing, but the idea was simple: write one act every week in January to complete it by my February 1st deadline and meet with Ian every week to share the most up-to-date script so that we can discuss how we want to write each act before finalizing the musical score. This plan worked very well, because when it came to February, I was already editing every single script and getting feedback from one of my advisors, Dr. Maggie Monteverde on how to rearrange the script as a powerful narrative without the music itself. Unfortunately, I did not anticipate editing the document as much as I did as there were a few plot holes that needed to be fixed. Some of these included changing the

character's names vs. keeping their original names, whether this would take place in Earth's solar system or in a farther solar system, and how everyone will be getting to each destination as it was separated into three acts between which a considerable amount of time had to pass within the story.

While finishing these edits, Ian and I discussed the final instrumentation for our project. After sitting down with another composer, Gordy Haab, during their recording session at Ocean Way, I learned how to pick instruments for each section of my composition to this narrative and dictate how they will influence the storytelling aspects. Gordy said, "the idea of an instrument being associated with a particular emotion is as old as music itself" (Haab) which led me to learn what each instrument symbolized and how I wanted it to interact with my audience. For example, the first act starts out in a space station overlooking the stars. Since this is set in space, I thought that there should be a minimal amount of music to resemble to vast emptiness of space. On the other hand, when we go to act three, we saw a tonal shift that sounds almost tribal, with native flutes playing in the background.

As we discussed these ideas of instrumentation and I informed Ian of what I learned from these composers, he created a brief two-minute composition that was used as our template for outlining the rest of the soundtrack. I shared this with part of my advising team, Keith Mason and Alan Shacklock, who gave small feedback about this, but generally thought that the composition was on point to what I was wanting to create based on our previous conversations. After completing an understanding of the instrumentation for this soundtrack along with a finalized version of the scripts by mid-February, Ian and I were able to begin working more closely together to narrow down what each scene would have musically. He informed me that the best way to make a score I wanted was to have an actual vocal recording of the script and then

write the soundtrack to that. I did not have enough time to record the voiceover section with high quality recording equipment, so I asked if he could write given the script I gave him and my own voiceover recordings of the entire recording. He agreed, and then we were able to make adjustments once the final voiceover recordings were completed.

Since the beginning of this project, my entire advisory team recommended that I find multiple voice actors for this project. At first, I thought this was not necessary and I would be able to do all of the voice acting. However, as I started sending my own voiceover recordings to Ian, I quickly realized a major issue. If I was speaking the entire time, it would be difficult to tonally decipher when someone else was talking because I had my own sound that would just be recreated in different accents. I also realized that my regular voice was simply not engaging enough to an audience for thirty minutes as well. Now that we were at mid-February, I was at a time crunch especially considering that I had no idea who would be good at doing a voiceover recording.

Consulted by Professor Keith Mason, I decided to reach out to the international student's office at Belmont University to get in touch with someone who might be able to help. I emailed them, with hesitation that I was not going to get a response back. Surprisingly, I actually received a response within a few hours from the faculty advisor of that Department, informing me that they would be happy to pass this opportunity along, but I would not be able to pay the international students due to the restrictions of allowing international students to get paid. After the faculty advisor sent out an email, I was immediately graced with responses from two students.

Initially, I was looking for a male vocal, as that was similar to what Marlow had been in Joseph Conrad's story, but I only received emails from females. I was confused and thought this

wouldn't work; however, I met with one individual, Tyler Smith, on the idea that this could actually be a unique take on this story. For over a century, this story has always been centered on a male, but I now have the power and ability to let it be voiced by a female. Tyler is an Australian native studying in Nashville to learn more about our music industry. When I shared this project with her, she was excited as she had done voiceover work before. She did try to sound more like a male vocal given her lower voice; however, I was thoroughly impressed by her voiceover abilities when we met and discussed her role as Marlow.

Now that I had found my main character, I asked Ian if he was willing to help with some of the minor roles while I took the character voiceover of Kurtz and the Narrator. With the casting complete, I hired my longtime friend at Belmont, Hayden Tumlin, who wasn't able to secure a session in a recording studio but let us record in her soundproofed room.

As things were starting to line up, we set our voiceover recording date for Wednesday, March 4th. We all showed up, and while I thought it would only take two hours, it actually lasted four hours. It took longer simply because we did not realize our voiceover for Marlow needed to take breaks so that she could maintain her accent and a strong voice during the recording session. After we completed the session, I had Hayden take the session and break it down so that we could give Ian the completed recordings as stems of each individual voiceover so that we could mix it with the music.

Unfortunately, it took her longer to mix the project longer than I thought and with an initial timeline of one week until my project was due, I was beginning to feel like I could not meet this deadline. Thankfully, Ian had already completed work on composing for two of the three acts, but had difficulty finding a flute instrument so we could create the desired tribal sounds in acts two and three.

As I was on spring break, I talked to the composer every day discussing the musical decisions we wanted to make and were able to work back and forth through email and text. We worked diligently, but with the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic taking place in the United States, it became more difficult as we had to focus on our priorities of finding places to live and determine what essential products, we needed to stay safe. Thankfully, on March 16th, one day before the initial due date, I received the completed project and he asked for my final comments.

When I listened to the final product, I was driving in my car and listening on my decent car speakers so that I could hear every note within the soundtrack. Thankfully, I absolutely loved it! I only had a few mixing issues and one small fix in the third act since we had been working together on acts one and two since February. Due to this, everyone had completed their parts and I had successfully managed the production of the project as a soundtrack producer. It felt like I had truly accomplished the work that I had been dreaming when I set out on this journey, and I am excited to share this work with the music community.

Honors Project Script for The Galaxy's Edge:

Setting:

Space, a reality that is devoid of sound, largely unknown before the 21st century. However, in 2399, we are a task force from The Universal Alliance assigned to mapping the unknown sections of the Pellacia System. Our story follows the narrative of an officer of this task force, Marlow, and his journey to find a missing crew who were surveying the resources and survivability for humans on the planet Mysterion.

ACT I:

It was silent across the galaxy. Over 100 billion kilometers away from Earth is Aegis, an intergalactic port within the Universal Alliance that's the customs entrance to Amphibia, one of the most visited planets in the Alliance. Watching hundreds of people refuel and go through customs, Marlow notices that in this astronomical operation his ship, one of the fastest in the galaxy, is still but an ordinary passenger vessel. His white and blue corvette TV4 space cruiser with newly installed turbo-thrusters houses a crew of 15: Chloridians, Amphibs, and Humans from the Universal Alliance waiting to find their next adventure from our captain. Sitting on the officer's deck, Marlow watches the stars flicker in the distance, curious as to which star is signaling his home planet Earth.

Looking out at the landscape of stars in front of him, Marlow observes a group of young cadets performing their first spacewalk and reflects on his first experience spacewalking. The free, weightless feeling floating in the middle of space was unlike anything he had ever done before, nothing securing him to his friends except for a small cable and his faith that it wouldn't break.

As the station orbits Amphibia, the Red Giant's brightness illuminating this galaxy gets blocked by the planet Amphibia. Darkness covers the entire station which allows him to see all of the stars illuminated in the galaxy. Marlow gazes out, searching for what lies deep within the universe. He wonders if he will ever get to visit every planet in the universe, even though he knows that it is just a dream. Floating freely and casually illuminating the darkness that covers Aegis, Marlow stands across the railing of the deck quietly looking at the stars in the solar system which are simply small orbs in a vast and open universe.

As Marlow continues to watch the universe fantasizing about his explorative dream, he quickly loses focus when a large, dull, grey-colored diplomatic ship arrives to refuel at the

station. Perfectly timed, he suddenly becomes aware of his surroundings again as his shipmates enter onto the officer's deck, laughing at the next batch of new recruits who are anxiously awaiting their first spacewalk. His crew joins him with refreshments from the recently restarted fast-food chain, McDonald's: The Outer Worlds. As they sit together eating their nutritious impossible burgers and watching the new recruits, they tell stories of their years before joining the Universal Alliance.

Among the comrades is a young Amphib known to everyone as TD (short for TD-1 Recruit) who is fresh out of the training academy on Aegis. With a clean-shaven, acne-covered face like that of a teenager, TD is eager to fit into the group of rugged, veteran shipmates. He wears his sparkling white uniform without any medals due to his lack of experience. He hasn't learned much (as he was at the bottom of his graduating class), but the group enjoys the company and young spirit as it reminds them of their days in their youth.

Across from Marlow is the Engineer: a Chloridian, sitting in his blackened and tattered uniform. Marlow doesn't see him much as he is usually in the engine room monitoring the ship's mechanical and electrical systems. With a musky odor emitting from his body and an e-cigar hanging from his mouth, he sits down with both legs on top of the table. In his head, he is running the calculations of the boiler room temperature, the required measurements to get back to light speed, and how fast he needs to eat his sandwich on his lunch break before getting back to work. The Engineer occasionally chimes in on the conversation with a simple grunt or laugh but rarely adds any true substance into the conversation until someone mentions a technical problem on the ship.

While the Engineer runs calculations in his head, the Helmsman, another Amphib, describes our newest technology on our ship – an H7V1 navigation system capable of steering

through lightspeed. This technology had already been enlisted on most ships within the fleet, but the Helmsman was late to adopt this new technology as he believed he could pilot the entire system without the technology. Though experienced, the Helmsman is cocky and arrogant, young and ready for any adventure. He is always running into trouble with the ship's security team trying to steal midnight snacks, sneaking into another person's quarters, or flirting with another team member on board despite it being completely forbidden. While the TD is fresh out of the academy ready for an adventure, the Helmsman has enough experience to tell a few stories and is always reliable when it comes to guiding us home and steering us clear out of danger. With his experience, many think he could become an officer but with his lack of maturity, we doubt he will ever make the officer's list.

As the Helmsman continues his shenanigans and talks about his newest romantic adventure with the young greenish colored female Andvera from Andulisia, the CLO (Chief Language Officer) walks in with an angry expression on his face. His responsibility is making sure no relationships occur on the ship. Walking slowly, the CLO takes his time around the circle of fellow shipmates to determine where he will sit. As expected, he sits next to the Helmsman. The CLO gives him a slight nudge to move over and whispers in his ear prompting him to leave on some business we can only assume had to do with his Andveran escapade.

The CLO, also the self-assigned historian for our ship, opens up the conversation about the controversial historical timeline of exploration that has occurred since the start of the Universal Alliance. The CLO began, "from the first men of Earth exploring the treacherous seas of the Atlantic and Pacific to the newest discoveries on the galaxy's edge in the Outer Rim in our solar system, we find ourselves all originating from organically primordial dark places of the universe. Humans were not always the hero of the universe as many see us today. When the

Europeans colonized much of Asia and Africa, they deprived the indigenous tribes of their simple way of life and put them into slavery, selling them off, separating generations of families and stripping these countries of their precious resources from their homeland.” Everybody knew that this was true and even saw that same oppression in their own societies.

Marlow chimed in and said “many species have also seen dark days like the humans on Earth. Everyone who has traveled through the Aegis has, at some point in their species, been invaded and an invader. Some have been like lightning in a cloud, a blitzkrieg, perpetrating quick invasions which devastated entire civilizations and tribes in a matter of days. Others, like the human occupation in the Andulisia system, have lasted decades. They take their time colonizing and alluring the natives with foreign treasures to manipulate them. Then, when the Andverans believed they were being given valuables in exchange for land, they really gave up the one thing that would enable their species to evolve technologically - resources. After a period of reconstruction and independence, the Amphibs are now some of the most well-trained and intelligent species to serve in the Universal Alliance. No matter their sociological status and IQ, we all come from a primordial savageness and a desire for survival by any means necessary in order to evolve as a species.”

Marlow hesitated about adding on to this one-sided discussion, but he risked it and opened up about a similar experience that happened a few years ago. “I was given an assignment to meet with the leader of our ship, The General, aboard the Nighthawk for an expedition in deep space. He debriefed me and assigned us the task to map a few unknown sectors of the Outer Rim, specifically the Pellacia System. We were going to travel to each planet to find traces and evidence of life and define the essential components of each planet, researching the viability of life for another species to colonize a largely uninhabited planet and the resources available to

mine from them. In this system, we traveled to Addion, Haydst, Mahldid, and more which have become the Alliance's current mining colonies for precious gems to sell across the galaxy."

Marlow realizes the crew is annoyed by his privileged view as they all look at the blinking meters instead of him so he tries to manipulate them into telling one of his iconic tales of exploration in the Outer Rim, "I know this is some rubbish of a story and something you would usually read in a textbook so I shall stop." However, the Engineer chimed in and said: "Marlow, you are the most experienced so if anything, we are due for some more wisdom from you." Earning approval, Marlow decided to continue his tale of when he was exploring the Outer Rim. "Well, if you are to understand the effect this journey had on me, you must hear the story that I am to tell."

"Out in each of these planets, supposedly, were settlements that had been established and begun by the Universal Alliance; however, our crew traveled much farther. We journeyed where only one crew had traveled before and the tale of their failed colony still remains folklore today. It quickly became a journey into our own hearts of darkness, a journey on which I would meet a man I had never believed existed, even though I had heard numerous stories of his expeditions during which he had been given the title Kurtz. This is the story of how I met the mysterious Kurtz."

Setup For ACT II:

After Marlow's comments about the beginnings of his trip to meet Kurtz, We find that his crew travels across the galaxy encountering many different obstacles to get to the Pellacia system in space such as navigating through an asteroid belt. Once the crew lands, they meet people of Mysterion. Our story continues through the many different villages and Alliance members Marlow encounters on the journey. This second act will show us a glimpse of the long

treacherous and deadly journey the crew embarked on to find Kurtz. They decide to take a break in the colony of Skeleks where one of Marlow's colleagues works. Marlow then decided to venture out into the desert on the last stretch of the trip before reaching Kurtz.

Act II:

“By the third week of our journey to the Outer Rim, our crew of about 15 people was deep within the Pellacia system. After traveling 780 kilometers in four days, we arrived at Skeleks, the last Universal Alliance colony on Mysterion. From there, we crossed the desert to find Kurtz. We established contact with the base commander to replenish our resources and learn more about the mysterious disappearance of Kurtz and his crew at Colony Z, which we hoped to reach in the next twenty-four hours.

The attack occurred three hours after we had left Skeleks, and the sun was beating on us as we had no protection in our expedition outfits. The only thing that got us through this heat in the desert was the knowledge that Kurtz and his crew were ahead in one of the most advanced colonies yet!

We sped across the desert in our P-777 TT land raptors, we approached a dense canyon area where we came to a fork in the road. We knew that one was supposed to lead us to Kurtz's location across the desert while the other was going to lead us to the Red sea, which was apparently a lake surrounded by exploding volcanoes. Since Kurtz was to the West of Skeleks, I took the left route, with no assurance that the path we were about to embark on was in any way headed towards Kurtz. Thankfully, I chose the right direction, but there was a cost to that route.

We traveled along in our land raptors, equipped only with protection on the front of the vehicle. This area was protected because the engine was most vulnerable from the front and most

debris would hit the front of the land speeder. Each speeder held five soldiers: one at the wheel, one seated above the driver to scout what lies ahead with their binoculars, two soldiers in the back, and one manning the turret at the front on top of the engine.

The turret held an SM-150, an old but effective weapon that became a standard within the newly established energy pulse rifle category given to the Alliance just two years prior. Despite this firepower, we were not to engage an enemy unless we were fired upon. The weapon on top of each vehicle was spotless, simply because we rarely saw any action in this expedition. Beating on top of our helmets, the sun shot arrows of radiation and beams of scorching hot light onto the canyon that reflected off of the walls.

As we approached the bottom of the canyon, we stopped at what looked to be a large rock that towered over the canyon's edge and created a natural bridge across the canyon. We decided to rest under this to give everyone a minute to get out of the sun and stretch their legs. As we got out, we noticed many caves of different shapes and sizes scattered across the canyon's faces. I thought that animals may have inhabited these caves to protect themselves from the heat as it was almost impossible for any one human-like species to live here given the atmospheric conditions. However, what kept me cautious was that this place was quiet – well perfectly quiet actually. It was as if someone pressed pause on the environmental surroundings around us as we stopped to take a quick break.

Charged with sacrificing his rest to protect the team, our turret gunner was the first to notice the uneasy feeling. It was quiet and calm, and it felt like someone was watching us, yet nobody was around. A shiver ran across my back, and then I felt it. Like a rush of wind, I was pushed down as a pile of boulders came tumbling down behind us and blocked the way back for

our crew to return to the base. I was almost paralyzed, in awe of how this could have happened from a small gust of wind, but then reality kicked back in.

It all happened in under two minutes, but it felt like it lasted hours! Swarms of pebbles and rocks were being thrown at us, rocks were flying from above, left and right coming from every which possible direction one could imagine. Our uniforms had armor against laser rifles, but they were not equipped to withstand the rough environmental conditions on Mysterion.

It was a mad frenzy and the men shouted in chaos, cursing every word known in their primary languages. I looked up to realize that these pebbles had come from the caves, above the bridge, and at the top of the canyon ridges. After such a long time in the heat, it was hard to distinguish which invaders were real and which were mirages to the eyes. When I found a real person at the top of the canyon throwing rocks down at us, I looked into their eyes. They were black and lifeless, with red pupils full of rage. It was as if they had only one set goal in mind: to kill anyone who was not them. They were a small, red-skinned species like that we had encountered in the village of Skeleks earlier, except they were a darker shade of red, likely due to their increased exposure to the red sun.

As we hid from them, we concluded that our attackers must be indigenous to the area, untouched by any of the Alliance in the region. They had no clothing and we could see their bare breasts moving loosely as their arms wound up to pelt us with rocks. Their large tails moved loosely behind them, often the only indication we had of where to find them, as their tails were too long to be concealed behind the rocks.

Getting my senses back, I quickly ran to the raptor so that I could get under the protection of my men and give the order to drive away before the main road was blocked. When I did this, everyone else was struggling to get to their vehicles as well so that we could take off. It was

sporadic, and everyone was disoriented except for the first gunner in raptor 1. He blindly fired almost every single round we had through his SM-150 energy pulse machine gun. He did his job protecting us from the animals living in these caves. After our previous experiences with this planet from explosive geysers to acidic rain, I could see the madness and rage within him, something that looked courageous on the outside, but was really an act of annoyance, frustration, and hate from within for this planet. Despite his efforts and advanced weaponry, he didn't hit a single one of them, which sadly showed his inexperience and lack of training, but he did not stop firing until he got his message across: LEAVE US ALONE!!!

We raced out of there with the engines roaring and echoing their infamous "raptor-like" sound that brought an immediate halt to the rock throwers. It was a reaction that, when the engine was at full throttle, scared the natives because they quickly squirmed back into their caves, ran from the canyon's edge, or crept back into their holes that were located on the top of the bridge. We drove probably 10 kilometers or so when we decided to give a quick halt on our cars and make sure everyone was accounted for. We yelled out rollcall until we reached the last solidier in the final raptor and we had every crew member accounted for. When this happened, a sigh of relief went over me, let me tell you, but there was another surprise.

Our lead gunner on the first space car said, "we should go back and finish those bastards ourselves! They have nothing out here; it would be a service to them anyways. Instead of traveling through these villages, spreading our influence and technology to their culture; let's eradicate them once and for ----" His voice cracked as he tried to finish his sentence. I started to point out the immorality of such an action when suddenly we all noticed a shiny blue liquid shine down his face.

His body was shivering and his mouth murmuring incessantly. He fell, face down and we saw what had happened to him – a large stick with something attached to it had pierced the back of his head. I picked it out through his head and noticed a sharpened rock at the end of the stick. I had only heard stories of these and played with holograms of these at the training academy. They were arrows shot from a bow and string, like that of the many indigenous villages we encountered at other undeveloped civilizations. Although I was fascinated by this ancient technology, the blue liquid smeared on the end of the pointed rock reminded me we still weren't safe and needed to get out of there.

I turned the gunner over, but it was too late. He was lifeless, and his eyes were completely white as his body quickly became pale. The men stood there uneasy, as this was their first casualty on the trip. They knew the gunner was reckless, but they had never encountered a loss of their comrades before.”

While Marlow was sharing this, the Engineer wept quietly, remembering when he lost his best friend to a similar attack during a mission a few years ago exploring another undeveloped planet. After a few moments of silence for the comrade we lost, TD was the first to look at me eager to hear more of the story.

Marlow continued where he left off, “holding my dead crew member in my arms, another enemy arrow shot and missed the second raptor’s front-left tire.

I know we should have buried him, but I also did not want to lose another crew member to these natives, so we tried to carry his body to the raptor. After risking our lives to get him on the vehicle, it was useless because he fell off immediately as we left, since his body could not be secured by the soldiers in the back.

As we continued through the canyon, it was quiet again, but not that perfectly quiet feeling we had experienced before the ambush. We were vigilant, ready for a strike at any moment, but the only enemies against us were the mirages and tricks the desert heat was playing with us again. Occasionally our gunner would fire a shot or a navigator would claim they saw someone, but another person would just tell them to forget about it and keep their eyes on the road instead as it was not worth our time.

After seven hours, we finally reached the end of the canyon, and the path began to rise out of this atrocious desert. The road continued on, now swirling back and forth as a switchback road continuing up to the mountains ahead of us. We thought we had been through enough already, losing one crew member, experiencing the worst environmental elements known in the Universe. Little did we know, Kurtz was about to exceed all of these encounters when we arrived at his ominous Colony Z.”

Setup For Act III:

Here is where we will finally meet the mysterious Kurtz and learn of his current emotional and physical state. This is set to be the climax of the story and serves as a way to identify the main theme.

ACT III:

“After a small trek up the mountains following a dirt road with minimal encounters, it ended with a sign that read: Welcome to Colony Z. We parked our vehicles where the road ended and decided to take our operation on foot. My crew got out of their vehicles, vigilant for what else this dangerous land could throw at them. As we followed the path, it was silent and we were trying to comprehend how we managed to survive that journey.

I heard a drum beating in the background. We looked to the right after walking into the village and saw Kurtz's soldiers, along with the natives of Mysterion he had recruited, who were gathering around what looked like a geyser. They were chanting and dancing around the bubbling geyser, believing that it had some mystical powers like the commander at Skeleks told us. Their bodies contorted like that of an acrobat. I had never before seen such contortions occur that could be possible, but the natives of Mysterion must have taught them with Kurtz's guidance. I later learned they believed that their dances around the hole from the ground would bring spirits into Kurtz's body from Mysterion and replenish what his body had suffered.

As my crew sat down to relax for a minute after surviving the journey, we heard a yelp of pain erupt from behind us. We had been told that Kurtz had succumbed to a flesh-eating bacterium that was slowly eating away parts of his body – starting first with his left arm. I heard the sound come from a small makeshift cabin on the right of us. We saw the likely unqualified doctor (based on his rugged appearance) come out of the room with an Amphib, who I had been told was Kurtz's longtime colleague and mentee. He informed us that Kurtz was unable to be seen at this time and we should not touch him as we could contract the deadly bacteria that was inside his body. The doctor said it would only be a matter of days before he would pass.

It was unfortunate that he was passing quickly, but our orders remained: bring Kurtz home and obtain intel from him about the resources available on Mysterion. With this in mind, I knew I needed to come up with a plan to speak to him alone, just to learn about what he had accomplished and tell of the great tales of Kurtz. After looking at the reports, my own observations, and interacting with his colony, I saw that the people believed Kurtz was untouchable, and all of the people in this village worshipped him. They believed that he had

curative powers of helping their crops grow and advanced weapon technology that would help them conquer the other villages so they could capture their women and resources.

I went up to his cabin, which was hand-crafted by Kurtz's mentee, an engineer. He stood guard outside, and I told him that he should be careful about how he was treating Kurtz or else the villagers would turn against him. The Amphib responded with the simple words of "he has done more good than bad here" and with that, he crossed his arms standing in front of Kurtz's doorway. He knew I wanted to bring Kurtz home, but wouldn't ever allow it. He had become trapped in his mind that he was destined to live with Kurtz his entire life. I had to be clever, so I told him that one of the villagers had burned their foot jumping over the geyser and that the doctor required his curative powers he had been learning from Kurtz to heal the native who was hurt.

I waited until the Amphib had completely cleared out the area, and then put on my gloves and mask entering Kurtz's quarters to finally meet the man of whom I had only heard stories. I shouldn't have been surprised, but I was. I expected a big, burly man with the look of a champion in his eyes. Instead, I saw a fragile, weak man whose legs looked like twigs instead of what I had imagined to be the size of tree trunks. He was grasping for his cup of alien insects, which seemed like the most unsanitary and disgusting meal I had ever encountered. He felt the textures of my gloves as he grabbed the bowl from me... different than what he had expected. When he looked up in my eyes, he said: "I had immense plans." His eyes were big, but his pupils were small. I assured him that his stories were legends across all of the Universal Alliance.

He lay back down and was unable to get back up, so I went up to his bed and sat next to him. He grabbed my jacket with the three fingers left on his right hand. I could tell his time was coming soon, but he wasn't ready. "Marlow, I have heard about you and I tell you... you must

know I am a God,” said Kurtz. I tried to ignore it, but when I looked in his eyes, there was no humility. Only that of a man who was too proud to ask for forgiveness.

I fed him his food, and he thanked me by telling me that I was not the man he expected. Confused, I asked why. He looked at me again with those mad eyes going on about his immense plans. When I thought about those ‘immense plans’, I realized what had happened. I had been hearing from the other intergalactic stations that he had planned for his system of grandiose operations he had wanted to conduct on Mysterion. However, what he hadn’t realized was how this place would consume him. He had taken from his training manuals and trained with the natives, but these natives were mad and uncivilized. They had no communication outside from themselves. They had a loose belief in the afterlife, but Kurtz changed everything about their existence. He became convinced that to achieve his plan he would have to let them see him as a higher power and to let them worship him and reign as their supreme leader over their universe, until he came to believe it himself.

We sat and talked about his time on Mysterion the rest of the evening, and it was the exact moment I had dreamed of since being inspired by him. However, I was uneasy the entire time because of what he told me before. We stopped early in the morning to get some rest as well. I fell asleep in a chair in his cabin, but when I woke up, I noticed he was not in his bed. I saw a trail of blood and followed it.

I got up to follow this trail, and it led out back to the side of the mountain that overlooked the arid desert we had crossed only a few days before. Instead, I saw Kurtz laying stomach down, with a pool of blood over his body. I rushed to try and help him, but he couldn’t move anymore. Kurtz looked out over what was quite possibly the tallest point on Mysterion. I knelt down and asked if he was ok. He instead looked across the desert stating, “these are my immense plans,

Marlow.” Confused, I asked what he means. He responded by telling me about his plans. “Over here on the left are the houses, people are safe and secure in a wall that covers them from any enemies or animals on this planet. On the right are the colonies of the Mysterions.” You could tell he wanted everyone to live in the same area, but not together. He continued by saying “and in the middle would be me. A temple, where I sit at the top where they worship me, and I judge everyone’s actions so that we can build a strong community together. It’s beautiful isn’t it?” This time I spoke up to let him know that he was only seeing a fantasy, not a reality. He looked up at me and began to move. He used all of his strength to stand up so that he could get closer to me. I tried helping him up, but he refused. When he was finally steady on his feet, he said “and now look what you have done, Marlow. You do not see this reality and you do not see what is true in front of your eyes. You are here for a different purpose that is not as high of a calling. If you choose to see it, you are free, but if you don’t, you are an infection that grows and can turn years of work into waste within days.”

He pulls out something from his stomach where he was bleeding, and as I move my head, I see a glint of light beam from his stomach so I can’t help but look. He pulled out a 3-inch shiv, likely what he had stabbed himself with and held it in his left hand. He grabbed my shirt with his other half-eaten hand and says, “do you understand how to stop an infection?” I quickly realized what he had in mind. It only took a small amount of force to take the weapon out of his hand. He fell and I back away.

He was unable to cry out for help because he knew that any last move would exert all of his energy and it could be his last! Despite my frustration at him, I ran over to help him up. He was heavier than I expected, but I managed to get a hold of his left hand. As I grabbed on, I heard him muttering, but I couldn’t make out what he was trying to say. I asked him to repeat it

and then I understood. It was the same feeling when the gunner got shot in the canyon. He understood where he was and how he had failed miserably. Reality began to sink in, and he muttered the words again: “The Horror! The Horror!”

After he said that, I realized that this was not the Kurtz I had intended to meet. The next thing that happened was that he fell off the side of the mountain down a 400-meter drop. I stood there in shock. His body flailed like an amoeba in every way and shape until his spine snapped at the bottom, but it felt like he fell into a never-ending abyss in my mind after he muttered those words, The Horror! The Horror!”

Conclusion:

This project is a cumulation of everything I have learned on my journey through Belmont. It represents my work in the Curb College of Entertainment and Music Business along with my work in the Artist Studio through the Honors Program. This project encouraged me to pursue my passions while finally making my dream a reality. It was a journey that showcased my leadership skills, musical talent, and educational desires to produce a product that is entertaining and engaging to exemplify why music is so influential in various forms of storytelling. I did research to confirm the areas that I was not confident in, and I continued to remain passionate about learning the artistic process by researching the concepts I did not understand and learning how to further myself in new emerging narratives such as Podcasting. This product, along with the research in this project exemplify how music can truly change a narrative. I firmly believe that after researching many different soundtracks and how they psychologically engage with media, music is essential to providing a robust narrative that provides meaning. Without the soundtrack to my recording, the actual story would not be engaging for an audience listening for 32 minutes.

Music has been around for centuries and dictates our narratives every single day. Like Gordy Haab said, “the use of music in film, tv, or games is a result of centuries of human evolution.” There are so many powerful stories happening every single day that are shared with the public. It may not be obvious, but music and sounds can be an essential component of our lives now more than ever before. It is healing, empowering, and can make a narrative stand out at times more than a writer, actor, cinematographer, or special effects team working in the entertainment industry.

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