

Song of the Weekend

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(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ljackaudiogroup>)

Entry: 20200125 – Stalker

This week's "Song of the Weekend" is Stalker, from the 3D Realms hit, "Duke Nukem 3D."

Stalker is one of the earlier songs that I did for DN3D. Exactly how early, I can't remember, but the earliest file date I can find comes from the middle of 1995 – more on that later. It's one that I wrote at home and brought up for the dev team to hear. It's also one of the earliest ones to utilize the EMIDI format, which is much too complicated to try and explain in a "Song of the Weekend" post. Suffice it to say that it does **not** loop around back to the beginning – it loops to a point after an introduction has finished.

The concept behind Stalker revolves (literally) around a "pedal tone," or drone note. The song is in the key of Gb minor, so the pedal tone (which is played in the low strings) is of course a G-flat. I've always been fascinated by how pedal tones work, with melodies and harmonies swirling around a stationary note, creating motion out of no movement at all. Stalker capitalizes on this in a big way: out of 77 measures in the song proper, 53 consist of an octave-doubled Gb pedal tone in the low bass part. The remaining measures either contain a Gb pedal tone in a higher register instrument or have an *ostinato* figure that centers on Gb. In one way or another, the G-flat note is omnipresent throughout the song.

The pedal tone does not mean that the song sounds like one big blow on a set of bagpipes. On the contrary: Stalker relies on percussion and on syncopated rhythmic figures in the melody to constantly move the piece forward. It begins with a melodic line in the bass guitar that plays on the upbeats of each half-beat against the pedal tone in the high strings. A trap set riff leads into the low basses taking over the pedal tone, with a polysynth joining the bass guitar in playing the full, extended melody. After the first phrase, the melody shifts to a synth brass line while a square wave synth begins playing a complex *ostinato* that will continue for most of the rest of the song. At the same time (!), the high strings come in with a reflection of the pedal tone in their middle-high register. They eventually harmonize this with a fifth interval during a crescendo that will fade to the end of the second phrase.

The eight-bar second half of the melody and harmony repeat, this time without the *ostinato*, but leading up to a four-bar section where the bass guitar, square wave synth, and a sawtooth wave synth play the *ostinato* in unison (or at least in octaves) while the drums take on a more driving groove. A tympani crescendo figure announces another four-bar section where the *ostinato* continues, beneath tympani crashes on the downbeat and brass fanfare notes on subsequent beats.

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As the final brass fanfare note sounds, the low bass moves away from playing the pedal tone, relying on the *ostinato* and other instruments to cover it. Instead, the low bass plays ascending whole-notes in octaves for two measures, then repeats for a total of four times. Above the bass, the high strings play pyramid chords of a sort, going higher and higher, until the entire ensemble comes to rest on an octaved G-flat, with the *ostinato* fading into nothing at the end of four bars.

Now, there is another earlier version of Stalker that exists. The final finished version came out in 1996 with the game, but in 1995 I'd put a beta version together. I recently ran across that version, and I've recorded it and will post it separately from this post.

I thank you for reading this far, and for doing so, please allow me to link you to a recording of Stalker as it was released in the game. Thank you for voting for your "Song of the Weekend"!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xuaR5q0G0yg>