# Analysis of the Scavenger’s Theme in Star Wars: The Force Awakens

**Trevor Fox** - ENGL395B Submission Date: Monday, Oct 23, 2023

## Draft

Leitmotif is a method dating back to the opera and its evolution that is used to link a particular passage of music to an overall theme or character. For example, the Force Theme represents a character’s reach into the inner machinations of the force, the Imperial March represents the coming of Darth Vader, and the five note motive which calls to Kylo Ren or Emperor Snoke. John Williams often uses leitmotif to accentuate the meaning of his music. Thus, it is prudent to analyse Williams’ work during Rey’s ultimate fight scene in Star Wars: The Force Awakens.

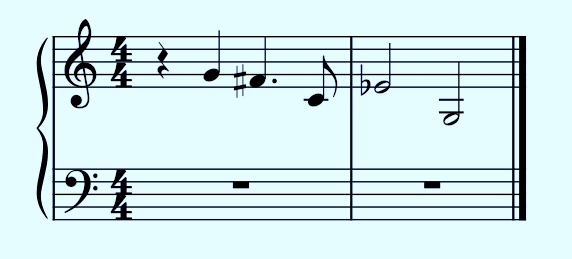
Star Wars: The Force Awakens (hereafter TFA) follows the development of many characters. For the sake of this analysis, Rey’s development from a scavenger on Jakku to a powerful force user will be put under scrutiny. When we first see her, Rey is scavenging for parts of a derelict Star Destroyer to trade for food. Towards the end of this scene, when she begins her homeward journey, The Scavenger plays. This piece is very whimsical, with woodwinds and violins comprising most of the foreground. At [1:31] (refer to listening material), the main motive plays. The Scavenger feels and sounds very open ended - almost like a conversation between the instruments. This wide soundscape and light instrumentation elicits a feeling of hope, and establishes that this character’s fate is not yet decided. For reference, this is the music notation for this theme:

A black and white image of a sheet music

Description automatically generated

In terms of the Mise-en-Scène surrounding the introduction of her leitmotif, Rey shows a great amount of control over her environment. She demonstrates intimate knowledge of her surroundings, she is comfortable being alone in the remains of a once-powerful Star Destroyer, and she knows exactly what she is trying to accomplish. Rey’s leitmotif represents her as a person, her confidence, and her seemingly unknowable future.

Rey’s ultimate fight scene with Kylo Ren is later in the film, in a forest on Starkiller Base. This scene is underscored by The Ways of the Force, an exemplar for the usage of leitmotif in TFA to convey the conflict independently from the on-screen visuals. It is a way to expand the scene for the viewers, and give a greater understanding of the forces at play in the development of Rey into a force-wielder. The scene is split in two by the action of the resistance attempting to destroy Starkiller Base. The Ways of the Force begins during the second part of the scene as Kylo Ren chases Rey through the forest, trading blows. First, as Rey is being forced backwards by her adversary, she manages to regain some control by escaping his onslaught and gaining higher ground. In this small action of the fight sequence, her leitmotif plays. This calls back upon her ability to maintain some control of her environment as the melody is played by violins, similar to The Scavenger. Then, the First Order motive is played as Rey is continually pushed back and overpowered by Kylo. This leitmotif - shown below - first heard during Kylo’s introductory shot, is played throughout the movie as an attestation to the strength of the Dark Side.



Consistent with the rest of the film, the First Order leitmotif is played by loud, blaring brass instruments - indicative of unbridled and uncontrolled power. Following Kylo’s utterances about teaching Rey the power of the force, she taps into a wellspring, and the Force Theme is played by woodwinds. After more struggle, the Force Theme plays again as the two grapple, and Kylo’s red lightsaber is forced into the ground. However, this time, it is played by brass. Last, after overpowering Kylo and striking him down, Rey’s leitmotif plays loud, with bright brass.

This quick sequence of numerous thematic changes represents the fate of Rey and the effect that this fight has on it. When she first calls upon the force, she does so with purity, enunciated by the usage of woodwinds. However, the second time, she has expended lots of unregulated energy tow brutally cripple Kylo, and uses the force to assist in defeating him as brass blares. When Rey’s leitmotif is finally played at the end of this fight, it includes the anger that she has built up during the fight. Her powers in the force hang in the balance. She exists in duality with both the light and dark side of the force, much like Luke Skywalker in Return of the Jedi. Furthermore, this build-up of power towards the end of the scene shows that she is as strong as Kylo Ren in the force, but does not know how to skilfully control it yet.

Notes

John Williams, the famous composer, conductor, and pianist, that wrote and conducted the score for Star Wars, contributes a powerful music scape for Star Wars.   
  
How does his music build on the general themes of Star Wars?   
- Williams is commonly praised for his use of the leitmotif. The force theme, to represent the inner machinations of the force; the Imperial March, to represent the coming of Darth Vader; and the March of the Resistance, to indicate the presence of the forces of good.  
  
Choose a scene that uses a particular musical theme (e.g. the Force Theme).   
- Trees Fight Scene: The Ways of the Force  
  
Think about the scene, the story, and the music. How does the score add to the scene and other aspects of the Star Wars story?   
- Different phases of the piece  
 - Kylo  
 -   
 - Rey  
 -   
 - First Order  
 -   
  
How does it make you feel?   
-   
  
Why?  
-

Establish the leitmotif. In her first scene. Shot with the toboggan. - Shows her control of the world around her - She is well traversed - This is “her craft”

## Notes

Whenever Rey gains control of the fight, her leitmotif plays.

[1:55:20] Fight scene

First order theme, as she is overpowered by Ren

“You need a teacher”

Force theme plays

Rey regains control, channelling the force, and the theme is undercut with her leitmotif The force theme plays again, louder than before Building up, until she finally strikes Kylo Ren down, playing her leitmotif in the same instrumentation as the first order’s theme (harsh brass). - Her unregulated use of the force to brutally overpower Kylo back - She hangs in the balance - She is just as strong as Kylo, in terms of the force.