

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS
- **For Educational Use Only** -

Back Hall

from

Amnesia: The Dark Descent

Composed by Mikko Tarmia

Transcription/Analysis by Seventh Sam

www.seventhsam.com

♩ = 72

Sopranos

Altos

Tenors

Harp I

Harp II

Violoncellos

Contrabasses

①

(add4) resolves to 3rd

(add2) resolves to root

7th of chord in soprano accentuates dissonance

③

Dm^{add4} Dm Am ② Dm Gm^{add2} Am^7

i v i iv v⁷

This short but powerful track occurs at only one point in the game: right after what is arguably one of the most viscerally terrifying sequences in all of survival horror (the infamous "water level"). Tarmia shows a great deal of understanding in this track, not just as a composer but as a *game* composer. The music, at this particular moment in the story, is meant to evoke an immense feeling of relief, a brief respite from an incredible trauma. In service of this, Tarmia chooses specific harmonic devices to zero in on precisely the emotional nuance required:

- 1) As opposed to suspensions, these resolutions are *in addition* to the third of the chord. The dissonances these **add2/add4** chords create against a minor triad structure is unmistakably melancholic and heavy. There may be relief, but it is brief and the terrifying experience has left scars...
- 2) No major chords (for now) plant the music firmly in Aeolian territory. This mode lends itself - almost by default - to a pensive, mournful sound.
- 3) The resolution (melodically and harmonically) to the tonic chord is a *subtonic to tonic* as opposed to *leading tone to tonic*. This keeps the music mellow, introspective, and moody. No drama here, just *denouement*.

9

Sopr.

Alt.

Ten.

Hrp. I

Hrp. II

Vcs.

Cbs.

4

5

6

7

Not sure if this is an extra voice or an artifact of reverb processing...?

Dm^{add4} Dm Am^{11} C $Gm7$ Gm C^{add2} C

i v $bVII$ iv^7 $bVII$

Even in a track this short, Tarmia sneaks in some contrast and a "mini arc" to the music. The first 8 measures were quite gloomy, but several things change to lift the music out of the gloom and into brighter territory, as if the player is coming up for water after nearly drowning...

4) Same tonic chord as before, but spaced more openly. This, coupled with the soprano line's ascent, creates a brighter feel with more dramatic tension. The music feels like it's going somewhere.

5) The addition of an extra harp arpeggiating open spaced chords further contributes to the effect described above.

6) Technically a $Gm7$ chord throughout the measure, but *starts* on beat 1 with only Bb , D , and F (a Bb major chord). This subtlety makes the whole measure sound like a major chord, which lends brightness and "relief" to the sound.

7) The track ends on a beatific $bVII$ major chord with an added 2, one of the more pleasant/peaceful sounds in western harmonic vocabulary. The music has guided the player to a brief rest, a short sigh of relief...and then loops right back. Simple, but so effective in context!