

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

Illusory World

from

Final Fantasy IV

Composed by Nobuo Uematsu
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Melody hovers statically around E \flat . This would normally suggest E Phrygian.
 However, this is the 7th of the tonic m/maj7 chord, which is *quite* a dissonance
 to accentuate in the **melody**. This is a major factor in the track's mysterious vibe.

A $\text{♩} = 80$

Oboe

Harp

Violins I

Violins II

Violas

Cellos

Bass

Strings enter with all *except* the root of the chord. These notes form an augmented triad. Augmented triads sound ambiguous and mysterious. Coincidence?

Key of F: $F_m/maj7$

i

$C_{maj7\flat5}$

V

Standard i - V vamp (oscillation between two chords) is transformed into an ethereal, otherworldly harmonic backdrop by using non-traditional 7th chords (minor-major 7th and major 7th flat 5, respectively)

Ob.

Straightforward harp arpeggios do the following:

- Keep the rhythm
- Create a characteristic timbre (Harps sound mystical)
- Create a constant impression of root position chords to keep dissonance at bay.

Modulation from F minor to A minor via subtonic (B) to tonic (A) motion. This creates a much softer cadence, appropriate for mid-track to keep the flow going.

Hrp.

Vlins. I

Vlins. II

Vlas.

This portion of the harmony could be considered a "topping off" of the last two measures of the melodic phrase. Much more interesting when split between two instruments rather than the oboe playing everything.

Vcs.

Bass

Fm/maj7

i

Cmaj7b5

V

Lovely "tritone resolution" to tonic keeps the track unstable and the listener engaged.

More tonal section is coupled with a more active and contoured melody. This creates contrast, which adds drama/interest to the track.

The A section - static and dissonant - represents the otherworldly foreboding surrounding the location.

The B section - dynamic and consonant - represents the human, emotional aspect of the location's denizens.

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B

Ob.

Hrp.

Vlins. I

Vlins. II

Vlas.

Vcs.

Bass

Uematsu could've just played measure-long notes and called it a day. Instead, he energizes this section (and contrasts it with the previous) with weak-beat accents in the strings.

Clever use of inversions allows a smooth, chromatic descent from tonic to dominant in the bass. The effect is accentuated by doubling up with the harp in octaves.

Key of A:

Am

E/G#

C/G

D/F#

Fmaj7

E

Am

E/G#

C/G

D/F#

i

V

bIII

IV

bVI7

V

i

V

bIII

IV

Second (consequent/answer) phrase of B section's melody is drawn out in preparation for the loop point.
This keeps the music from sounding too repetitive as well as creating a "mini resolution" to the tiny story the track has to tell.

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Ob.

Hrp.

Vlins. I

Vlins. II

Vlas.

Vcs.

Bass

Harp arpeggio contours widen to signal the approach to the loop.

Fmaj⁷

B^ø

E

bVI⁷

ii^ø

V

Uematsu makes a lovely creative decision at the loop point.

He precedes the loop point with a very pointed and decisive cadence (bVI-ii-V-) which - in a minor key - will resolve very well to the tonic (A minor, in this case)

But - subversion time!

Instead, Uematsu cuts everything out for a beat, then abruptly loops back to the F min/maj⁷ harmony in the first section.

The cumulative effect is that it throws the listener off, leaving the music in a perpetual state of wonder and mystery.