

**VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS**  
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# **The Dreadful Fight**

**(Battle with the Four Fiends)**

*from Final Fantasy IV*

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Transcription/Analysis by Seventh Sam  
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**Intro**

Am ♩ = 83

E7(b9)

The musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is for Strings, followed by Brass, Cymbal, Concert Bass Drum, and Electric Bass. The score is in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 83 bpm. The key signature is A minor. The score is divided into two measures, labeled '1' and '2'. Measure 1 is in 4/4 time, and measure 2 is in 6/4 time. The strings and brass play a melodic line in unison, with notes colored red and blue. The electric bass plays a steady eighth-note pattern. The cymbal and concert bass drum play a simple rhythmic pattern. The score ends with a double bar line and a 7/8 time signature.

(1) - The four lead voices - high/low strings and brass - are playing in unison and doubled at the octave. Even though they are playing one melodic line over the tonic note in the bass, there is tonic-dominant tension throughout the line. I'll explain in detail (refer to the color-coded notes and slurs to see what I mean):

- The RED note groupings use the leading tone of G# and certain notes of the scale to tonicize/imply the A minor (tonic) chord.
- The BLUE note groupings use the secondary leading tone (D#) and the dominant note (E) to imply - roughly - the dominant chord.
- Thus, using the leading tone and certain emphasis/weight on parts of the scale, a single melodic line sounds like it has an incredible amount of harmonic motion.

Notice, too, how the groupings get smaller and "squeezed" towards the peak of the phrase. This rushed harmonic rhythm plunges the listener immediately into the jagged, threatening, and highly dramatic track that follows.

The musical score is arranged in five staves: Str. (Strings), Brs. (Brass), Cym. (Cymbal), BD (Bass Drum), and El. B. (Electric Bass). The first measure is marked with a circled 'A' and 'A° (1)'. The second measure is marked with 'B°'. The score includes a 3-measure triplet in the first measure and a 4-measure group in the second measure.

(1) - Technically, these are not diminished chords, but just bare tritones/augmented fourths. Hardly a comforting sound, these are clearly used to signal danger and fear to the listener. This fight will *not* be easy.

### OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE STRUCTURE:

Unlike previous battle themes, Uematsu chooses an almost entirely through-composed structure for this track (the E section is the only one that repeats). Additionally, he varies the metric symmetry and phrasing heavily between sections; some are steady and easy to follow, while others contain contours and rhythms that jump all over the place. The cumulative effect is similar to that of a roller-coaster, full of jarring and exciting turns that keep the listener on their toes (and interested). The reason for these choices is clear: Uematsu wants this fight theme to stand out, to unequivocally signal *danger* and *hardship*.

Even with all this chaos, Uematsu wisely chooses to ground the music in a very static harmony, rarely deviating from the tonic A minor chord, the dominant E major chord, or the sub-median F major chord (and all the 7th/extended variations thereof). Occasional chromaticism is used for effect, but you'll notice that the harmony never travels too far in tone or structure from its, dare I say, *dreadful* sounding tonic.

Am<sup>7</sup> F/A Am<sup>6</sup> F/A Same

5 6 7 8

Str. (1)

(2)

Brs.

Cym.

BD

El. B.

(1) - Taken together, each of these two measure phrases could be considered one measure of 13/8 (3+3+3+2+2 groupings). The groupings of 3 are punctuated by the cymbal crashes, with the timpani rolls lending an additional hand in accentuation. This asymmetrical rhythm has a disorienting effect, as if the music is being "pushy" and rushing the listener. However, I chose to write it out as a measure of 7/8 followed by 3/4 for formatting reasons...

(2) - The harmony is formed by contrary motion in the top strings (RED) and the top brass (BLUE) moving against bass pedal of A and the lower strings and brass reinforcing the other chord tones.

- The top strings move *up* chromatically from E to F# and back again.
- The top brass move *down* chromatically, from G to E and back again.

This overlapping motion subtly shifts the "fifth" of the chord up and down over an unchanging root and third, creating a smooth, subtly dissonant change of harmonic coloration over what *sounds* like the tonic chord. This is quite similar to harmonic techniques used in other soundtrack music, such as the James Bond theme.

9 **B** E7<sup>(b9)</sup> 10 Fmaj<sup>9</sup> (2)

Str. (1)

Brs.

Cym.  $\frac{4}{4}$

Hat  $\frac{4}{4}$

BD  $\frac{4}{4}$

El. B.  $\frac{4}{4}$

V<sup>7b9</sup> (3)  $\flat$ VI<sup>9</sup>

(1) - The rhythm and meter stabilize, giving the listener a *brief* reprieve from the chaos preceding.

(2) - Another reprieve comes from the harmony, a vamp between two chords that create a dramatic, desperate, *slightly* hopeful sound. This is because the harmony - while technically on the V and  $\flat$ VI of the tonic minor chord - is *also* on the I (major tonic) and  $\flat$ II chord of the dominant key (Could be thought of as the Phrygian Dominant, the fifth mode of harmonic minor).

(3) - Broken octaves in the bass line use one channel to create the impression of two voices an octave apart, making it seem like there is more low-end than their really is. This is a useful technique for composers with limited voices/resources at their disposal.

11  $E7(b9)$  12  $Fmaj9$  (2)

Str.

Brs.

Cym.

Hat

BD (1)

El. B.

$V^{7b9}$   $bVI^9$

(1) - Rapid, agitated scalar motion is used throughout this track to keep the music frenetic and jumpy, to keep the listener's nerves on edge. These flourishes are not over-used, but appear at strategic times in the music to signal cadences, section changes, etc. Voicing them in thirds thickens the sound and creates the impression of a larger orchestra despite the sound fonts.

(2) - The choice of a thundering bass drum over the usual drum kit in this track is quite intentional. Uematsu wanted this track to stand out from the other battles as more threatening and dire (hence the title). The use of this war-like drum pulse keeps the music from sounding "safe" or "cool", something a drumset might do.

13 **C** G Dm7 E7 14 G Dm7 E7

Str. (1) (2)

Brs.

Cym.

BD

El. B.

bVII iv<sup>7</sup> V<sup>7</sup> bVII iv<sup>7</sup> V<sup>7</sup>

(1) Variation of the Andalusian (bVII-bVI-V) cadence, with the Dm7 chord containing the notes F-A-C (the bVI chord)

(2) The "call and response" arrangement in this two measures is an effective way of generating intrigue and interest. Strategic use of silence and thinning out the voices shake up the loud *tutti* that's been heard up until now. It makes the listener wonder, "What's coming next? Is the fight going to get even *harder*?"

15 **D** Am (1) E $\emptyset$ /A 16 Am Em/A 17 Am E $\emptyset$ /A 18 Am (2) Am G $\sharp$ m A $\sharp$ m Am

Str.

Brs.

Cym.

Hat

BD

El. B.

i ii $\emptyset$  i v i ii $\emptyset$  i

(1) The harmonic choices, oscillating over the pedal of A to a steady pulse, communicate one thing to the player: "Tremble and despair." If the previous measures posed a question: "Is this fight going to get worse?", the musical answer is "*Much* worse." The ii half-diminished chord and minor dominant chord create a very dark, unrelentingly *mean* sound.

(2) - Another effective use of sudden, rapid motion. The listener has been lulled into a despondent stupor by the previous measures, and is quickly slapped awake by a loud, chromatic passage that catapults into the ensuing section.

19 **E** Am

20 B Am B

Str.

Brs.

Hat

BD

El. B.

i

(1)

(2)

II i II

- (1) - Another instance of implied harmonic motion in the bass line. The slurred notes (in RED) imply a dominant to tonic leap.
- (2) - The irregular phrasing in the brass section (which carries the melody) is particularly effective in creating a halting, rhythmically disorienting effect. The first measure of 4/4 builds up and gradually completes its motif (the first slur), then awkwardly repeats it on the first *upbeat* of a truncated 2/4 measure. This makes the music feel rushed, like it has to "catch its breath". The end result is that the music - as it has done so well before - keeps the player/listener on their toes the whole time.

Am

B

Am

21

22

Str.

Brs.

Hat

BD

El. B.

The musical score consists of six staves. The top two staves are for strings (Str.), the next two for brass (Brs.), the fifth for hat, and the bottom for electric bass (El. B.). The bass drum (BD) staff is also present. The score is divided into two measures, 21 and 22. Measure 21 is in 4/4 time, and measure 22 is in 2/4 time. The electric bass line in measure 21 includes notes with flats and sharps. The hat part consists of rhythmic patterns of 'x' marks. The bass drum part has specific rhythmic notations. The brass and string parts have melodic lines with stems and beams.

i

II

i

B      B $\flat$       A      A $\flat$       A $\flat$ °7      G°7      G $\flat$ °7      F°7      Am      E      Am

(1)

(2)

(3)

i      V      i

- (1) - Descending chromatic chords give a dizzying sense of "falling apart", as if the player was hit so hard they started seeing stars.
- (2) - Another skillful use of silence and thinned-out voicing to punctuate the music and retain interest.
- (3) - The rhythmic groupings increase the sense of falling, as if the listener is reaching terminal velocity:
- The first four groupings are in 3
  - As the measure comes to a close, they truncate down to four groups of 2
  - Then, in *mm.*24, the awkward, syncopated figures gradually die out. The music, like the exhausted but determined player, has a moment to catch its breath.

*NOTE: The bass slides down in the original, but I couldn't replicate that accurately in MuseScore.*

25 **E'** 26

Str.

Brs.

Hat

BD

El. B.

The section repeats exactly.

27 28

Str.

Brs.

Hat

BD

El. B.

The musical score consists of six staves. The top two staves are for Strings (Str.), the next two for Brass (Brs.), the fifth for Hat, and the bottom for Electric Bass (El. B.). The Bass Drum (BD) part is indicated by a double bar line and rests. The score is divided into two measures: measure 27 and measure 28. Measure 27 is in 4/4 time, and measure 28 is in 5/4 time. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The brass plays a melodic line with eighth notes. The hat plays a consistent rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The electric bass plays a melodic line with eighth notes and some accidentals.

29 30

Str.

Brs.

Cym.

Hat

BD

El. B.

The image shows a musical score for a band, spanning measures 29 and 30. The score is written for six parts: Strings (Str.), Brass (Brs.), Cymbals (Cym.), Hat, Bass Drum (BD), and Electric Bass (El. B.).

- Measures 29 and 30:** The first part of the score covers measures 29 and 30. Measure 29 is in 5/4 time, and measure 30 is in 4/4 time. The time signature changes from 5/4 to 4/4 at the beginning of measure 30.
- Str. (Strings):** Two staves. Measure 29 features a melodic line with notes: G#4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G#4. Measure 30 features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: G#4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G#4.
- Brs. (Brass):** Two staves. Measure 29 features a melodic line with notes: G#4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G#4. Measure 30 features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: G#4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G#4.
- Cym. (Cymbals):** One staff. Measure 29 is a whole rest. Measure 30 features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: G#4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G#4.
- Hat:** One staff. Measure 29 features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: G#4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G#4. Measure 30 features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: G#4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G#4.
- BD (Bass Drum):** One staff. Measure 29 features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: G#4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G#4. Measure 30 features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: G#4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G#4.
- El. B. (Electric Bass):** One staff. Measure 29 features a melodic line with notes: G#4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G#4. Measure 30 features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: G#4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G#4.

31 **F** F Am7 (3) F7 Am7 F E

32

Str.

(2)

Brs.

(1)

Hat

El. B.

bVI V

- (1) - The slurred melodic line in the brass (highlighted in RED) is a melodic inversion of rising chromatic string part from the beginning of the piece. (See *mm. 5-7*)
- (2) - The voices in the strings double the brass line an octave below (highlighted in BLUE). The "echoing" of the descending figure in the lower strings sets up the next phrase (*mm. 33*) for the string rip effect to come.
- (3) - The harmony in *mm.31* - via the chromatically descending figure in the brass *over* a fixed bass-line tracing the chord of F major achieves the same "gliding of the fifth" device that was used in the beginning of the track (See *mm. 5-7*)
- (4) - The voices unify into a half-cadence that then deceptively resolves to the  $bVI$ . This has the effect of prolonging the tension until the loop point two measures later.

F E Eb E Dm G#<sup>o</sup>7/D E7<sup>b9</sup> Am/maj<sup>7</sup> E7 (2)

Str. (1)

iv vii<sup>o7</sup> V<sup>b9</sup> i<sup>7</sup> V<sup>7</sup>

(1) - The strings descend the A Harmonic Minor scale in thirds, setting up the highly dissonant dominant (and secondary dominant) chords to follow.

(2) - Uematsu sets up a very decisive cadence here, but makes the very skillful choice of looping the track not to a tonic chord, but to the *common-tone diminished chord* (or, truthfully, a tritone of A-Eb). This means the music doesn't really "resolve" at all and slams the player/listener *right* back into the action. This is an extremely deft way to use the "problem" of needing the track to loop to the composer's advantage, because it plays right into mood of a exhausting, consequential, and nerve-wracking battle.