

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

**The Gestahl Empire**  
**(Vector Theme)**  
*from Final Fantasy VI*

Composed by Nobuo Uematsu  
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**Intro** ♩ = 43

Chimes

Violins I

Violins II

Violas

Electric Bass

$E^b_{maj}7$   $G^\circ$   $A^b(b^5)$   $Cm7$   $E^b_{maj}7$   $G^\circ$   $A^b(b^5)$   $Cm7$

This particular track accompanies the player's entrance to the evil empire's headquarters: a sprawling technological metropolis named Vector. Uematsu sets the mood perfectly with the following techniques:

- 1) The chime + bass creates an ominous rumble that serves as a persistent reminder to the player that they're not in Kansas anymore: this is the lion's den and they'd best be on their guard. (Uematsu would go on to re-use this timbral motif quite liberally for Sephiroth's music in Final Fantasy VII).
- 2) A chromatically descending motif (highlighted in red) accompanied by some unsettling and ambiguous non-functional harmony paints a very specific "mood picture", that of a desolate, totalitarian hellscape where all joy and hope has gone to die. Along with the visuals, it's a very memorable part of the game.
- 3) By descending the progression an octave, Uematsu "sinks" the player/listener even further into the dismal scene.

*Note: The third of the  $E^b(maj7)$  and  $Cm7$  chords are omitted. By taking out the third, the specific chord quality (minor, major, etc.) is removed; this has the effect of making the harmony more ambiguous and - in the case of this track - more unsettling. The labels are as they are for readability's sake.*

5 **A**

F Hns.

Tpts.

2

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Cme.

Vlins. I

Vlins. II

El. B.

① Cm7 Db+ Db<sup>6</sup>/<sub>4</sub> Cm7 Bbm/maj7 Db<sup>6</sup>/<sub>4</sub> C<sup>5</sup>

(1) - Two things about the harmony/chords:

a) I'm 99.9% certain that Uematsu didn't compose this "chord first". Why? Not only does this track quote a leitmotif from much earlier in the game, it also bases the harmony largely off of the interaction of said leitmotif with *another* motif that is introduced in this track: that of the chromatically descending strings.

b) The harmony is modal - rather than "functional" - and thus the chords are a result of the interplay between the ever-present tonic (C) and the other elements. Therefore, these chord symbols are really just suggestions, rather than definitive answers.

(2) - The call and response between the timpani and snare drum infuse the already slow-paced rhythm of the track with a very "processional" feel. Motion and drive are replaced with solemn inertia, one that even further enhances the oppressive mood.

9

F Hns.

Tpts.

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Cme.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

El. B.

Same

The A Section repeats exactly.

13 **B** 1st and 5th scale degree reinforce tonal center

F Hns.

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Cme.

Vlins. I

Vlins. II

El. B.

*f*

*f*

D natural acts as leading tone to Eb (minor)

Bb now acts as 4th degree of Lydian mode.

The track abruptly modulates to Eb Minor.

- *mm. 13-14* can be considered an elongated Eb minor chord, over which a melody derived from Eb minor is played.

- *mm. 15-16* can be considered an elongated Fb major chord, over which a melody derived from Fb lydian is played.

(Fb Lydian is enharmonic to E Lydian, and may be easier to conceptualize that way)

This vamp between these two tonal centers a half step apart is akin to the i -> bII chordal motion inherent in the Phrygian mode.

Thus, this entire section can be thought of (in a "meta-harmonic" sense) as being in Eb Phrygian.

The point of this kind of motion is the drama it creates - the tug of war between the solemn minor tonic and the stark contrast of the bright bII major sound.

17

F Hns.

Timp.

Con. Sn.

Cme.

Vlins. I

Vlins. II

El. B.

E $\flat$ m

An interesting and effective way to loop back to the beginning here. The music quiets down, the horns blurt out a meager attempt at a figure, and the snare sticks out amongst the emptiness. All of it is quite evocative of the quiet despair that this area of the game is meant to represent.

### What does Uematsu change in this track, compared to "Troops March On"?

- The tempo is slowed considerably; it's less of a military march and more of a \*funeral\* march.
  - The percussion is thinned out and characterized by call-and-response as opposed to a consistent drive. This again imparts a "funeral" like feeling.
  - The sections of the melody carried by the horns and trumpets are reversed. Since the melody is a downwards contour, this has the effect of placing the trumpets in a lower register which creates an aggressive and intimidating sound compared to the other way around.
  - Harmony is introduced in the way of chromatically descending lines, which in turn creates a dissonant, moody atmosphere.
- Along with "Under Martial Law", Uematsu employs the harmony as a two measure progression juxtaposed against an asymmetrical four-measure melody. In this track, take a look at mm. 5-6 and compare them to mm. 7-8: the harmony repeats itself, but the melody - due to its asymmetrical nature - is different. It's a lovely effect, and quite possibly figured out ahead of time.