

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS
- For Educational Use Only -

The Mines of Narshe

from

Final Fantasy VI

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1 **Intro** ♩ = 53

2 3 4

Harp

Strings

Bø Fmaj7^{b5} Bø Bø Fmaj7^{b5} Bø

RED: Appoggiatura, resolving to root.

RED: Appoggiatura, resolving to third.

HARMONIC STRUCTURE:

Unlike a lot of the more classical-inspired tracks in the OST, this one is modal in the *true* sense. It never really resolves, instead dwelling in a densely harmonic "mood" rooted in a vamp between two tonal centers/scales that *themselves* vamp between two extended chords derived from their respective scales.

- The **INTRO and A Section** are rooted in B Locrian (the infamous unstable mode). Both the Bm7b5 and Fmaj7b5 are derived from the mode, differing from each other only by one note which allows smooth voice leading.
- The **B section** side-slips up a half step to C Dorian, from which the Cmin, Eb and Gm triads (and the various extensions) are derived.

Thus, roman numeral analysis doesn't apply here since a jazz-inspired chord-scale approach is taken.

DRONE/PEDAL POINT:

The B natural drone in the bass is a technique to keep the music rooted firmly in B Locrian. Without it, the music could accidentally sound like it wants to resolve to C Major.

5 **A** 6 7 8

Snps. $B\emptyset$ $Fmaj7^{b5}$ $B\emptyset$ Same

Str.

Bass

SWING:

If the harmony is derived from jazz, why not the rhythm? The drone is replaced by swing 16ths on an upright bass (although the effect of the drone is maintained, as B natural and F natural - the tonic tritone - are emphasized). Additionally, finger snap sounds - a cliché invocation of a certain kind of jazz sound - create the 4/4 pulse throughout the remainder of the track.

The question is: why "cool" the music down like this? The scene is one of danger and apprehension, the protagonist an amnesiac fugitive on the run, lost in foreboding mines full of hostile creatures.

It's entirely possible that Uematsu just made his choices impulsively, but I have a different take. Rather than create a standard "scary dungeon" feel, I think he wanted to highlight - through the musical choices - that the mines are not entirely dangerous, but rather a hidden ecosystem beneath a sleepy town that contains all sorts of colorful characters. From helpful winged teddy bear things, to a thieving jackal-person, to an imprisoned god-creature...there are many emotional tones, both in the music and in the setting.

9 **B** 10 11 12

Snp. **||** Cm⁹ Gm^{add4} Cm¹³ E^{badd2} Same

Str.

Bass

RED: Melodic anticipation

SUBTLE CONTRAST:

B Locrian sounds quite dark and foreboding.

C Dorian, on the other hand, sounds more hopeful and somewhat enigmatic.

These things are subjective, of course, but it's fairly obvious that there's an emotional contrast between the two sections, however subtle. This keeps the music interesting since it's going to loop for a *long* time.

A'
13 $B\emptyset$ $Fmaj7^{b5}$ 14 $B\emptyset$ 15 *Same* 16

Snp. Pno. Str. Bass

STRAIGHT AGAINST SWING:

- A piano figure over an implied pedal point of D natural creates an interesting rhythmic contrast to the swing of the bass.

PIANO FIGURE:

The upper melodic figure of the piano motif contains a C#. This can be seen, theoretically speaking, two ways:

- The melody is derived from the D melodic minor scale (as evidenced by the D as the pedal point)

OR

- The melody is derived from the F lydian augmented scale (the third mode of D melodic minor), given that the C# appears over $Fmaj7^{b5}$, which is actually an $Fmaj7\#11$ chord with the fifth and ninth omitted.

Either way, the effect is to add yet another layer of nuance to the already complex and somewhat ambiguous mood of the track.

B'

17 Cm⁹ Gm^{add4} 18 Cm¹³ Eb^{add2} 19 Same 20

Ob. RED: Leading tone of F# temporarily tonicizes Gm chord. RED: A natural creates #11 lydian sound over this triad.

Str.

Bass

OBOE MELODY:

A forelorn oboe enters with a sweet melody, confounding the previous jazz elements with a classical element. More subtle eclecticism = more focus from the listener on what the music actually sounds like, less focus on what it's "supposed" to sound like.

- In mm. 19-20, the melody loosely references a motif found in the "Esper World" track from later in the OST. In this track, the descending chromatic motif is in 32nd notes, but in "Esper World", it's in triplet form.