



Cyborg Love Songs

Version 1.0, released 02/08

Anu

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The RPM Challenge

This is the challenge: record an album in 29 days, just because you can.

That's 10 songs or 35 minutes of original material recorded during the month of February. Go ahead... put it to tape.

It's a little like National Novel Writing Month, (NaNoWriMo.org) where writers challenge each other to write 1,700 words a day for 30 days, or the great folks over at February Album Writing Month (fawm.org), who encourage artists to write 14 new songs in February. Maybe they don't have "Grapes of Wrath" or "Abbey Road" at the end of the month, or maybe they do—but that's not the point. The point is they get busy and stop waiting around for the muse to appear. Get the gears moving. Do something. You can't write 1,700 words a day and not get better.

Don't wait for inspiration - taking action puts you in a position to get inspired. You'll stumble across ideas you would have never come up with otherwise, and maybe only because you were trying to meet a day's quota of (song) writing. Show up and get something done, and invest in yourself and each other.

Anyone can come up with an excuse to say "no," so don't. Many of you are thinking "But, I can't do that! I don't have any songs/recording gear/money/blah blah blah..." But this doesn't have to be the album. it's just an album. Remember, this is an artistic exercise. Just do your best using what you have in order to get it done. If you have a four-track, become a four-

track badass! A mini disc, a pro-tools rig, a Walkman, an 80's tape recorder – use it. Do your best. Use the limitations of time and gear as an opportunity to explore things you might not try otherwise. If you can afford studio time in a "real" studio, fine, but let's be completely free of any lingering idea that "good" records can only be made in a studio. If that were so, then all the old scratchy blues records or Alan Lomax field recordings that have changed our culture – the world's culture – wouldn't still resonate with us today as they do. Springsteen's haunting classic "Nebraska" was a demo he did at home on a crappy machine. That album is fricking awesome. What label would put those recordings out now? (See: who cares) There are a million examples of this kind of stuff, but the fact will always be: Well written, honest music is compelling and undeniable no matter what it was recorded on. So put it to tape.

February will come and go whether you've joined in or not, but do you really want to be left out?

To recap:

- This will be fun!
- Ten songs or 35 minutes of recorded material, on a CD, postmarked or hand-delivered by noon on March 1 to:
RPM HQ
10 Vaughan Mall, Suite 1
Portsmouth, NH 03801
USA

- Recording can only be done in the month of February – no prerecorded songs.
- All material must be previously unreleased, and we encourage you to write the material during February too.
- Participating bands get their own page on the site, which you can blog to as much as you want. You also get access to the band-only discussion board, where you can swap ideas, resources, etc., and the ability to e-mail and private message with the other participants.
- All the completed albums may be put up in the jukebox on the website, if you so choose, so people can check it out; conversely, if you'd rather not share your work with the public, then no one needs to hear it but us.

Write some instrumentals, split up the songwriting duties amongst band members, form an RPM side project, write songs on the piano or clarinet instead of your primary instrument, make that metal album you've always wanted to - buy a ukulele! Just do your best to make the best album you can. Be unafraid.

What if every musician you knew put their music first for 29 days?

What if you recorded the best song of your life?

What if the world was never the same?



What's stopping us? Nothing. February is Record Production Month. You have no reason to say no, and nothing to lose.

Taken from the RPM Challenge website.



RPM 2008

Why would anyone try to write and record an album in a month?

I worked with a musician once who would have thought the RPM challenge was worse than a waste of time. "Why make something if it's not going to be great?" he'd have said.

My attitudes about creating things have changed substantially over the last 20 years. At present, I believe the more you do things, the better you get at them. That's the idea behind practicing scales or lifting weights or speaking a foreign language. So the more I write music, the better at it I get, even if each individual piece isn't the best thing I've ever made. I get better at singing, programming synthesizers and beats, mixing, and engineering.

I also believe that creativity and songwriting have a mysterious quality - at the initial stage, I never know how my ideas are ultimately going to turn out. Forcing them in a particularly direction (or forcing them, period) never seems to produce satisfying results.

Many of my favorite compositions happened quickly. I believe there is a reason creators historically talk about "inspiration" as something over which they have little control. So the more songs I write, the more likely I am to get something powerful or interesting, and the better I get at following my muse.

I also never know which songs will resonate with people and/or me - which ones are "good" and

"bad". Mathematically, I do know that if I have a 10% "hit" rate, writing 100 songs means I'll have 10 great ones, and writing 10 songs means I'll have 1 great one. So more = better.

Anton Webern died leaving behind about three hours' worth of music. Some of it is fantastic. I wish there were more. I want to leave something behind, though I don't pretend to approach Webern. Since the age of 16, I've tried to produce an album's worth of music each year, and I've more or less succeeded.

I get tremendous satisfaction from completing projects. And just like writing songs makes me better at songwriting, doing things like this record makes me better at goal setting and achieving. Not many people make music, much less a record a year, much less a record in a month.

Finally, it's fun. Yes, it's stressful too. I can't say I enjoyed waking up every Saturday morning this month thinking "I have to write and record two tracks this weekend." There were days when I'd much rather be doing just about anything else. But even after more than 20 years of recording music, hearing that first mix of a song still makes me feel good in a way nothing else does.

Maybe it's self-indulgent. Maybe the record isn't "great". But I really enjoyed making it - that's the most important thing. I hope you enjoy listening to it.

- Anu Kirk

29 February 2008

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Daemons

I've never really felt
that I was ever good enough
But even I can be improved
If I just stay tough

My teeth are metal reinforced
My eyes are plastic lens
And daemons run inside my head
Imaginary friends

To make a statue take a hammer
and smash what you don't want
To sharpen up a blade you scrape
until the dull is gone
They say you must destroy yourself
in order to create
Before you can be loved
You must be someone you hate

I will change

The daemons run inside my head
and tell me what is wrong
They point out what can be improved
and focus on my flaws
I listen to their whispering
and I hear what they say:
I am still not good enough
So I smash and scrape
Smash and scrape away

I can change
Try harder
Am I still the same?
Still the same

I've been reading so much information
about my situation
A chemical mix
that I must fix
I think it's magnesium

Pills three times a day
I changed the food that I ate
Re-uptake takes time
I'm sure I'll be fine
I can metabolize the rest

Potassium in deficit
Dopamine agonists
B complex and bone
Titration and chrome
Unraveling bit by bit

There is a balance I am seeking
A solution I can make
A certain ratio I must not go below
Something I can take

Is the problem the serum or cells?
Am I toxic?
I can't tell
But I know I can't stop
And soon I'll unlock the secret
And then there will be
No twitching, no scratching, just sleep
No itching, no thrashing, just peace

There is a balance I am seeking
A solution I can make
A certain ratio I must not go below
Something I can take

[illegible]



Home is where the hum is

As a baby
the car's engine
would put me to sleep
my parents drove all night
and they raised me
by the TV screen
Now I wake to static late at
night

At 30,000 feet
above the earth
the Rolls Royce thrusters
scream
and strapped into seat F-24
their rumble bids me dream

When I travel
I long to hear the hum of
machines
at home
All the sounds
that comfort me
the fans
and furnace
drone



Ctrl-Q

This is much better than it's ever been before
Much more speed
more rich
more real
more more
I feel like I could go for hours
and it only hurts when I stop
This is much better than it's ever been before

There are others here just like me
We don't have much to say
We chase our daemons every night
through a dark unending maze
Nothing really changes here and
I end up back where I start

I wish I wanted to stop

I thought my addictions were at an end
Now it seems they've come back for revenge

But it all adds up to nothing
And all I've got to show
Is wasted time
and a wasted frame
and memories of where I've been
but I can never go

I wish I wanted to stop

I thought my addictions were at an end
Now it seems they've come back for revenge



Perfect

I am painting a picture
with blood and wire
I am writing my story
in glass and fire

It's almost right
It's almost nice
Just one more twist
and I'll be fixed

Perfect, so perfect
This pound of flesh
Perfect, so perfect
I'll be the best

I am heading for somewhere
that few have gone
I am approaching the limits
and I've just begun

And it's almost right
It's almost nice
Just one last change
I'm still the same

Perfect, so perfect
I can almost touch
Perfect, so perfect
It's not too much

Perfect, so perfect
Just need to be strong
Perfect, so perfect
This can't go wrong

Perfect, so perfect
The end is in sight
Perfect, so perfect
I'm almost right

Perfect, so perfect
The end is near
Perfect, so perfect
There's nothing to fear

Download

Forget everything
Drift in the white noise ocean
The sun is rising

Let go of yourself
See the beautiful blankness
It's Monday morning

This won't hurt a bit
Breathe in the clean new program
It's time to wake up

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Cyborg Love Song

O machine, O mirror
Can you make the picture clearer
And bring me nearer to thee

Make me 1ne, make me (w)h0le
Scan my imperfect soul
And correct the mistakes that you see

You're everything I want
You're everything I need
You're everything I love
My machine

O mind, O flesh
Will you please accept these updates
The upgrades and the rest?

Take me in, take me deep
Listen to me speak
Finally you will be your best

It's everything I want
It's everything I need
It's everything
I love my machine

I'm everything I want
I'm everything I need
I'm everything I love
I'm machine

I, machine



Undo

There's no going back
to how it used to be
I've known it all along
but I didn't want to see
Command-Z
Ctrl-Z
There is no "undo"
and like it or not
This is you

This is you

This is it
That's as good as it gets
I made a few mistakes
I'll live with the regret
There isn't anything else to say
I'm going to have to learn to live this way

I'll live this way

DO NOT TAKE THIS MEDICINE if you have had an allergic reaction to it or are allergic to any of the ingredients. Exceeding the recommended dose or taking this medicine more often than directed may cause serious side effects. Your dose may need to be adjusted. Exceeding the recommended dose or taking this medicine more often than directed may cause serious side effects. Your dose may need to be adjusted. Exceeding the recommended dose or taking this medicine more often than directed may cause serious side effects. Your dose may need to be adjusted.

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The first few days

Tuesday, 05 February 2008

The 2008 RPM Challenge has begun! I've been busy since Friday night and have already produced 2 tracks.

The first track is tentatively called "Perfect". It's built around a whole-tone scale (made obvious by running up the scale early in the song). I'll say this - it's hard to write melodies in whole-tone when you're not used to it. It really sounds weird. But that's OK by me - I'm looking for something a little outside what I'd normally do here. I need to finish the words and I'm not thrilled with the vocal performance yet, but the rest of the track seems promising. I spent Friday night and most of Saturday working on this one.

magnesium deficiencies can produce some of the symptoms I've been having.

After doing some poking around on the Internet, I realized that the quest for completely balancing one's body chemistry is good grist for a song.

Maybe I'll call it "Magnesium and other metals" or something to do with the periodic table.

Saturday night I started in on a new piece. I was thinking about how easy it's been for me to fall asleep on airplanes (and how difficult to sleep anywhere else lately). I wanted something that would convey the dream state and flying. I built this song out of noise and drones, and did a very low vocal reminiscent of a track I recorded 10 years ago called "LEM". An appropriate homage. Working title for this song is "Home is where the hum is". More or less finished after a second mix pass - lots of low-end energy made for an overly muddy mix the first time around.

Between these 2 songs I already have nearly 8 minutes done. Seems almost too easy so far!

Today I was researching some of the physical problems I've been having - apparently

Bug# 20392

Observed behavior: Involuntary muscle spasms and twitching in left leg during rest. Discomfort during waking hours. Stretching and massage provide temporary relief.

Expected behavior: No spasms or twitching during rest. No discomfort in absence of other factors

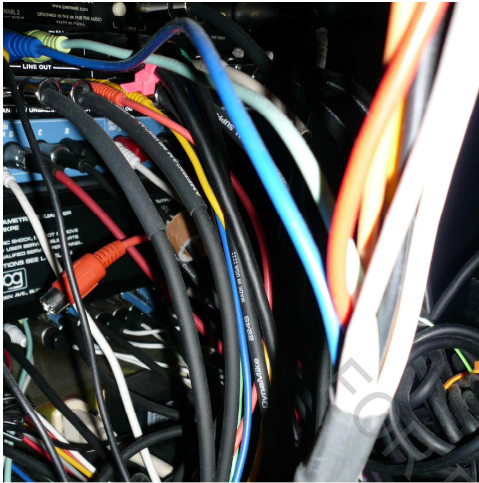
Repro steps: Hard to reproduce. No clear cause. Potential issue with neurological integration? Stress-related? Vitamin/mineral deficiency? Bone callus from previous upgrade potentially irritating surrounding tissue due to overuse?

Proposed Fix: Adjust vitamin/mineral balance – magnesium, sodium, calcium, iron, B-complex levels all noted as important for proper muscle function. Magnesium serum levels appeared normal during recent tests, but magnesium intra-cell levels and uptake not tested. Alcohol consumption reduces magnesium in body. Heavy exercise reduces magnesium in body (due to red blood cell damage). Recommend utilizing supplements on schedule and observe results (low risk, see notes below). Note complex body chemistry interactions exist between magnesium, sodium, and potassium.

Adjust neurochemistry – research indicates dopamine deficiency may cause similar effects (e.g. Parkinson's). Ingest dopamine agonist in small titrating doses on schedule and observe results (medium risk, see notes below)

Risks/Known Issues:

- Excess iron/iron toxicity extremely harmful. Toxicity achievable with small doses. Previous tests do not show iron deficiency.
- Magnesium in large doses may cause diarrhea. In rare cases, excess magnesium can result in kidney failure.
- Early **signs of magnesium deficiency** include loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, and weakness. As magnesium deficiency worsens, numbness, tingling, muscle contractions and cramps, seizures, personality changes, abnormal heart rhythms, and coronary spasms can occur
- Sodium imbalance (excess/deficiency) may cause muscle fasciculation. Sodium deficiency highly unlikely
- Dopamine agonists carry potential for augmentation (increase in symptoms/onset of symptoms at earlier times)
- During titration (up or down), dopamine agonists may cause excessive muscle spasms (Warning: potential feedback loop!)
- Dopamine agonists have been shown to cause hallucinations, compulsive gambling, and increase in sexual behavior
- Somnolence, headaches, and nausea are side effects of increased dopamine levels
- Long-term usage of dopamine agonists carries dependency risk
- Other long-term effects of adjusting brain chemistry unknown



Magnesium and Q

Sunday, 10 February 2008

A busy last few days. During the week I started on "Magnesium and other metals" (a.k.a. "Periodic Table").

I tried using a few new instruments that I hadn't used much before. The good news is I got them to work. The bad news is that getting the sounds exactly right was tricky - some parameters weren't quite right, and it took some doing to dial them in.

The end result was a close to final version of "Magnesium". The mix was all over the place, but this morning I sat down and got it all worked out. I think it still needs some backing vocals on the chorus.

Then I had some dinner and listened back to the mix. Vocals are too loud and probably have too many words.

But...I have 18 minutes, 30 seconds in 4 songs. I'm halfway done.

I wanted to keep moving and on schedule so I started thinking about the next song - "Q" (or "CTRL-Q"), a song about video game addiction. I also wanted to do something that was sort of swing-y and in 6/8.

I built the track up pretty quickly and went off to the gym, wondering what I would do for vocals to keep it from sounding too much like "Personal Jesus". Fortunately, I heard some tracks off the IAMX album "The Alternative" and it gave me all the inspiration I needed.

I got back from the gym and threw down the vocal, which turned out much better than I thought for a first take/trial. Forgot to eat dinner but got the track done.



Bugs discovered in Beta

Copying tracks in Cubase 4.1 and then deleting the audio leaves behind any automation data. May be intentional, definitely unexpected.

Certain Cubase projects utilizing the Sonalksis TBK plug-ins and the Steinberg/mda Vocoder would re-map the MIDI channel for the vocoder to the Sonalksis plug-ins, producing unwanted results. Suspect it is related to opening old project formats or copying tracks.

Cubase 4.1 does not properly enter ID3 tag information into MP3 files it creates.

Drawing automation in Cubase 4.1 for the Sonalksis TBK1 filter while a project is playing back will frequently result in the project becoming corrupt. Workaround is draw automation when project is stopped.

Hellgate: London does not support hiding the UI at present time. Crop out UI using image editor.

Booksmart 1.92 will crash to desktop periodically. No repro case.

Booksmart 1.92 frequently displays truncated text and/or incorrect fonts.

Anu still has trouble falling asleep. Brain refuses to shut down, resulting in looping audio, thoughts, and continued twitching. No workaround.

Compaq HP2510p has poor color calibration.



One minute left

Monday, 25 February 2008

It's been a long, busy, and challenging few days since I last posted. At that time, I had about 4 tracks near done ("Perfect", "Home is where the hum is", "Magnesium and other metals", and "Ctrl-Q").

In the two weeks since, I've had many rehearsals with one of my other bands culminating in a show at the DeYoung Museum, the usual crazy stuff at work, and a few very bad nights of sleeplessness and twitching in bed.

I also had an old friend visiting from out of town who stayed in my studio.

Regardless, I've managed to get 3 more tracks finished.

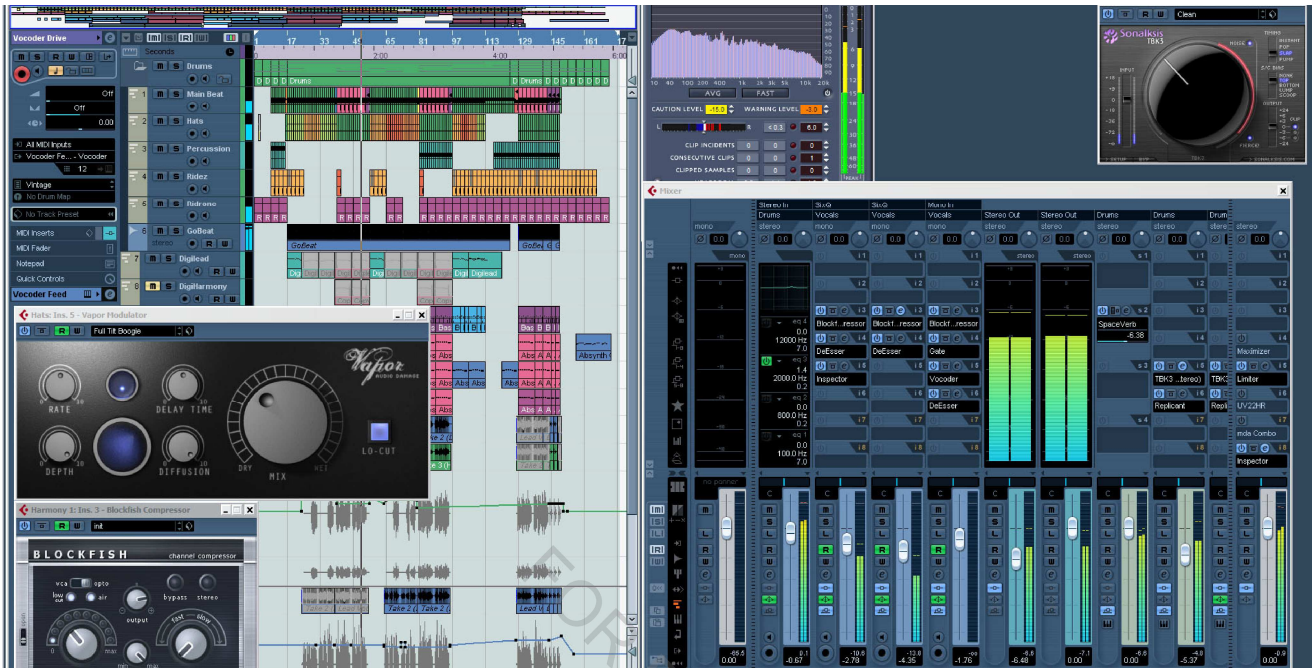
"Daemons" was the first of the 3. Drum and bass-inflected pop. My lovely wife provided some lyrical criticism which led me to substantially improve the song. And per Brian Eno, there appear to be no problems that more backing vocals can't fix. This will almost certainly be the first track on the record.

"Cyborg Love Song" is the inevitable title track. This one was surprisingly easy. From just a tiny bit of lyric and a melodic fragment in my head, the rest sprang out. It's sort of unabashedly pop and (new) romantic. which is appropriate given that I wanted to make a synth-pop record. The project has gone in a little bit of a different direction, but there's something I find beautiful

and disturbing about this song.

The worst part of working on it yesterday was that after having gotten close to final, some plug-in had a bad interaction with Cubase and it corrupted the session, preventing me from saving and forcing a crash followed by a reboot. Nice. I've traced it down - apparently the Sonalksis TBK Filter doesn't play nice with Cubase if you draw in automation while the track is playing back.

"Undo" was today's task. An homage/rip-off of everything on Burial's "Untrue" album. It's going to be the last track on the record. It's also got a few nods to some other tracks, including "Decayed, Decayed". I am not 100% happy with this one right now, even though it is probably



done. We'll see how it sounds in a day or two, and how much time I have left.

I also demoed "Download" but this is likely going to undergo substantial changes. The good news is that it only has to be about 2 minutes long - I'm down to the last minute but I plan on mixing the heads and tails of the songs together and this will likely "eat" a minute or so.

One interesting thing is that most of these songs stretch out a bit - they have long intros and outros, something I haven't done in 10 years. Some of that is giving the songs some room to breathe instead of "don't bore us, get to the chorus". Some of it is padding to hit the 35-minute mark.

The only other thing I have to do this week is finish up the book, which I'm waaay behind on. Then again, I guess only the album/audio has to be finished and shipped by 3/1, so no sense in killing myself over it if I don't have to.

The Finish Line

Thursday, 28 February 2008

I'm done. 38 minutes and 5 seconds, 8 songs. Plus a book. Not bad for a month's work.

I could probably have bashed out another song and gotten to 9 songs and 45 minutes (typical overachiever!), but I more than finished, and it's been a stressful, busy, long month. Plus I have to get the book done, which I'm doing, well, now.

I "mastered" the album on Tuesday night. Downloaded iZotope Ozone, which has a generous 10-day trial policy. I was planning on buying it anyhow but Tuesday night confirmed it. I don't consider myself a good mastering engineer, but with some fumbling around in Ozone and reading the amazing guide iZotope wrote, I feel like I was able to get the record in the ballpark of something that sounds good - the volume levels of the tracks are appropriately balanced and the overall mix has a decent frequency response curve. Both are improvements over the completely unmastered "Decayed, Decayed".

I also assembled the album as a complete audio track - there are no pauses. "Gapless" they'd call it. I think of Pink Floyd myself. Anyhow, it flows nicely from start to finish. Not boring. No cop-outs. Even a few songs I'd call

I drove the car to work on Wednesday because it was street-cleaning day and so I could check the album out. It sounds good in the car, on all my headphones, and on some computer speakers.

This year I didn't have a wealth of images to draw on like last year - the image on the lyrics page for "Home is where the hum is" is from 2007 - but since it's the plane flight that inspired the song, I guess that's legit. Iran took some great photos of me, however, and I'm particularly pleased with the "Daemons" headshot image.

I found a few computer art generators and played around with those. Most aren't very interesting, and the ones that are decent are crippled. The exception would be "Viscosity", which I used to create the cover and several variations. Looks interesting and unique and vaguely like Joy Division's "Unknown Pleasures".

Today I worked on finishing the book - did a bit of work at the office over lunch. Tomorrow I expect to put finishing touches on the book, print it out, and put RPM 2008 to bed.

Learnings

When I finished the RPM challenge last year with "Decayed, Decayed", I wasn't sure I would accept the RPM challenge again. It was interesting but also stressful. But as February 2008 approached, I began to get ideas and decided I would give it a shot.

So what have I learned after two years of an album a month?

Plan way ahead. For both albums, I had a guiding concept solidified before February started. I returned to these concepts repeatedly to guide me.

Keep creating and judging separate. The only times I got "stuck" creatively were when I started thinking too much about whether or not what I was making was "good". Once I got the creative ball rolling, best results were obtained by keeping it rolling.

Use templates. Computers let you work really fast if you make some stock starting points. I figured this out about halfway through "Decayed, Decayed" and it saved precious hours. I started this record with some templates but didn't stick to it and it definitely cost me.

Presets are very useful. I modified many but always started by just browsing what I had. Bigger, well-sorted libraries (thank you Kore and MediaBay!) made things much easier - when you have thousands of sounds, being able to dial up "digital metal bass" makes life much easier.

Give up quickly. I had a few track ideas I started this year that weren't going anywhere. I wasted several nights grinding away on them instead of just saying "nah, this isn't working." Know when to walk away.

Good ideas matter most. The most challenging part for me was coming up with a good idea for a track. Once I had a decent idea, making the rest of it was pretty easy. The times I started out without a good idea tended to be dead-ends of noodling and production.

Second drafts help. Every time I re-wrote or tightened lyrics, melodies, or sounds, it made a big difference. Of course, there's only a limited amount of that one can do in this situation.

Do as little as possible. This means tightly scope the project. I didn't try to do a double album. I kept my own performing to a minimum so I could leverage the computer. My objective was just to meet the challenge, not over-achieve.

This also means stopping overdubs and layers as quickly as possible. Some of these tracks are very simple, but they still work. It's easy to get lost in adding tons of parts and tweaking parameters and sounds. Do as little as possible to achieve the goal, then move on.

Do not despair. I worried a lot - that I didn't have enough ideas or songs or photos, that it all wouldn't work. But it did, more or less.



Known Issues

Tracks 1-3 may have digital overs/clipping at the pre-mastering stage. Status: Will not fix.

Track 6 has an error on the outro - the drones should stop at the same time as the metal grinding sound, but instead they stop about 500 milliseconds before. Status: May fix in upcoming release.

Track 7 utilizes a random slicing effect. Current mix produces undesirable result during outro. Status: May fix in upcoming release.

Track 7 has a noticeably off-pitch vocal note during the second verse. Status: Will not fix.

Lyrics for several tracks may not rhyme and have unusual or sloppy meter. Status: May fix in upcoming release.

Mastering implementation is preliminary and should be considered beta. Status: May fix in upcoming release.

Software listing may contain inaccuracies. Status: Will verify in next release.

Leg twitching during rest continues. Difficulty falling asleep. Status: Continuing to monitor situation, actively seeking solutions.

The error box image at the end of the book is too low resolution for decent printing. Status: Will not fix - too difficult to get higher resolution version.

Software

Effects

Audio Damage Discord 2 pitch shifter
Audio Damage Fluid chorus
Audio Damage Liquid flanger
Audio Damage Replicant
Audio Damage Reverence reverb
Audio Damage Vapor modulator
Digitalfishphones Blockfish compressor
Digitalfishphones Floorfish expander/gate
iZotope Ozone Mastering
Kjaerhus Classic Auto-Filter
Kjaerhus Classic Compressor
Kjaerhus Classic Delay
Sonalksis TBK1 Creative Filter
Sonalksis TBK2 Digital Grimebox
Sonalksis TBK3 Über Compressor
SPL De-Esser
Steinberg Roomworks SE Reverb

Hosts

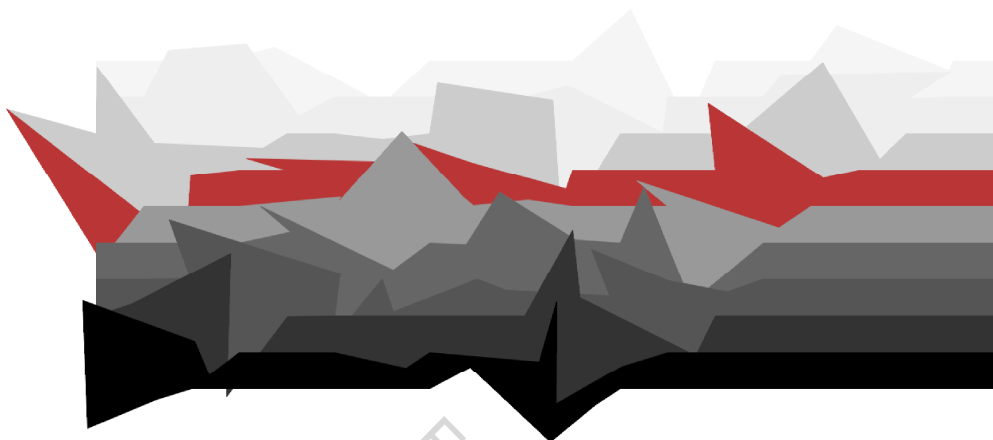
Steinberg Cubase 4
Steinberg Wavelab 3

Instruments

Humanoid Sound Systems Scanned Synth Mini
Native Instruments Absynth 4
Native Instruments Battery 3
Native Instruments Reaktor 5
Steinberg Mystic
Steinberg Prologue
Steinberg Spector
Waldorf PPG 2.V

Hardware

Alesis Ion Virtual Analog synthesizer
Dell 2407WPF widescreen display
Doepfer Pocket Control MIDI controller
Doepfer Pocket Dial MIDI controller
DSI Poly Evolver Keyboard synthesizer
Event 20/20 bas monitors
Grado SR-80 headphones
JoeMeek SixQ microphone preamplifier
Mackie 1604-VLZ mixer
Mark of the Unicorn Traveler audio interface
Microsoft Natural Ergonomic 4000 keyboard
Midiman Midisport 4x4 MIDI interface
Logitech MX518 Gaming-Grade mouse
Sony MDR-7506 headphones
Spectral Harmonics Kremlin-class computer



Written and Recorded
by Anu

Blue Moscow, San Francisco
February 2008

Special thanks to my wife, Iran
Narges.

Her perspective, photography,
and tolerance of noise made
this project possible.

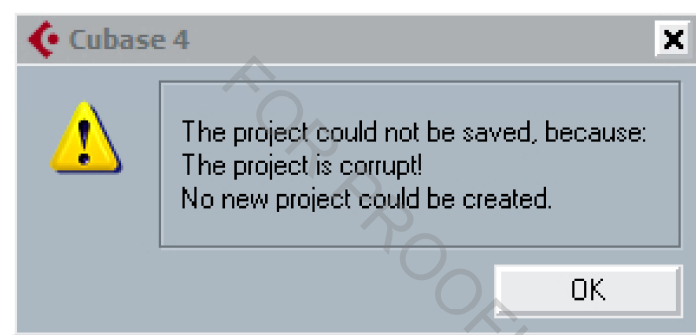
Original digital artwork
created with Viscosity.

Screenshots from Hellgate:
London by Flagship Studios
and Enemy Territory: Quake
Wars by Splash Damage.

The music for this project is
available through most major
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