"Dagon" Project Binder

By

Deniz Ekin Polat

This piece was named after a story written by H.P Lovecraft, which is a story about a man who got lost in the open sea and lost his mind after experiencing a traumatizing event. When I read the story for the first time, I heard a lot of sound clues in my head. That's why I decided to make a piece under its inspiration.

My initial idea was to make something like an audiobook with a voice reading the story and I was going to sound behind it. Then, with some advice from Robert Rehnig, I decided to keep it as just an inspiration for an electro acoustic composition. I wanted to keep as abstract as possible to focus on the fears represented in the story. Fears such as; getting lost in the open sea, fear of getting captured by an enormous creature, dying slowly by hunger or simply fear of the unknown.

When I was thinking about the piece in my head I had three different sections to compose in my mind. First one was the delusional part where everything is more abstract and difficult to distinguish. Second part was the antagonist getting swallowed by the sea. Therefore an underwater part should be composed.   My initial thought was to tell the story but not really to follow a certain timeline. Therefore I began the piece with some gestures which gave clues about the story.

After deciding what I'm going for, I started gathering some material. My first approach was to collect as my sound material as possible from the objects that I found. I went for the everyday objects such as lighter, glass, paper, bottles, metal objects. I used Zoom H4N and Zoom H5 to record these objects. I also spent a night in Ilm Park to record the sound of the river and the trees there. I was hoping to record some nocturnal animals like owls as well, but I couldn't find any. Nevertheless, I was able to record some interesting stuff.

Then I wanted to imitate a sound of thunder and a wave using the sounds I recorded. My first studies were thunder imitations using materials like door shutting, wood crack etc. With some layering, pitch shifting, reverb and little bit delay I was able to design pretty convincing thunders.

Before going into adding effects and editing I made myself sure that the sound material that I was going to use was clean and ready to work with. In order to do that, I used Reaper's spectrogram displaying options and EQ. I cleaned up the unwanted noises from the recordings as good as possible. Once I became sure that I could work with them I started to layer them without adding any effects to see how they sound raw.
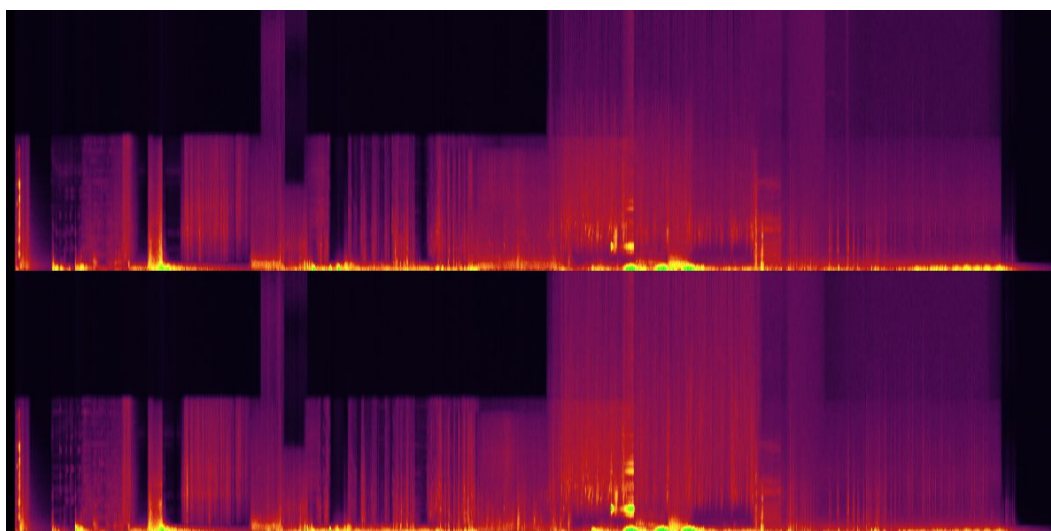
Spectrogram of the piece.

In addition to the live recordings, I decided to use my guitar to create certain sounds, especially high-pitched ones. I was familiar with the guitar techniques that I can use from my previous piece, "Fallen into Disrepair" which also largely featured guitar. However,for this one I followed a different approach to use my guitar. Instead of featuring the guitar as it is, I wanted to

make it sound like synthesis, making it almost impossible to identify as a guitar. Therefore, I

used really distinctive plug-ins from Uh-Pik such as Granular Synthesis, Delay, Phaser and

Flanger. My guitar was directly plugged in to the sound interface, in this case Focusrite Scarlett

Solo. Then I used my whammy bar to play the guitar. This is a technique that I used for some

time for this course and I'm also using it for the DBO. It allows me to get higher frequencies

from my guitar as well as more granular sounds.

Various Uhbik Plugins.

Then I moved on to create some phrases with the material I collected. For the very beginning I

simply edited the sound of opening a cork, rapid hits on a glass surface and lighter which ends

with a wave sound. With this gesture that I composed, I wanted to give the feeling of a sort of

quick introduction of the piece and what the listeners should expect from it. By making it sound

as much interesting as possible, my initial idea was to hook the listeners and urge them to listen to the piece carefully. I find it somewhat more interesting to start with a loud, easy to remember gesture. Then I followed a principle that I learned from Robin Minard, to be quiet in order to not to scare the listeners, of course within the boundaries of our hearing abilities.

The next section, which starts around 00:15 starts with a metallic guitar sound that I slided my whammy bar on my guitar's neck to create. Then a fragile granular sound again from my guitar follows this around 00:18. A second and more powerful hit on guitar follows up with a metallic sound. This gesture is followed by some water sounds to give a clue about the consent of the piece and upcoming themes. This gesture ends with a cracking paper sound which I processed with some delay and granular synthesis. The next section starting around 00:40 is one of the most important gestures of the piece, which creates a strong relation with the story that I'm inspired by. It is an imitation of what we hear when we are underwater then moving out water followed by a ship horn. This part is a clue to a part from the story where the antagonist left the ship he had held or the part he was found before losing his mind.

For the section that starts around 00:56 I used the sounds of a plastic bottle and some paper. I simply stracted the surface of the plastic bottle's sticker with my fingernails and teared up the paper on different speeds. Later I layered and panned them with modulation to different channels.
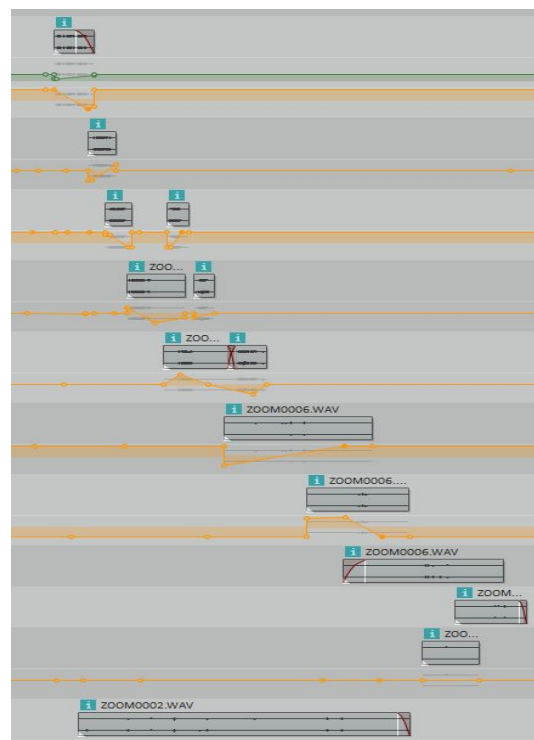
After the paper, I decided to move on to the next section. This part focuses on water sounds more than the other sounds. In order to gather some material to compose this part I recorded different variations of water sounds by using different objects. The first one (01:18) is just a single water drop on which blends with the last paper gesture. After that, a rain sound on tarp (01:19)follows and there is slowly wood creaking underneath it. I automated the frequencies of the EQ on the water on tarp as well with some automation on the wood creaks' panning. In order to record the water sounds I used my Focusrite Scarlett Solo with a Behringer C-2 microphone. This section ends with a high-pitched crack sound at 01:28.
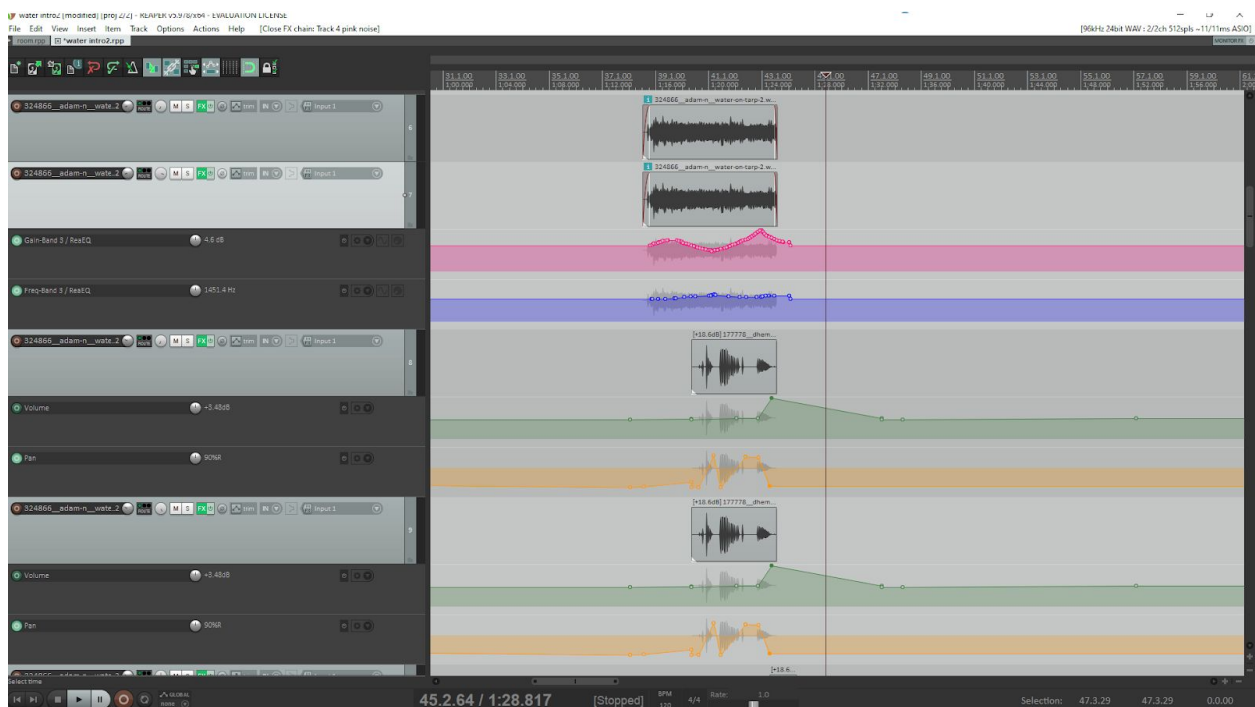

The automation of the rain drops on tarp and wood creaks.

Around 01:29 I used the sounds that were made with some spoons in a plastic bowl then I used a Granular Synthesis, Argotlunar to process the sounds.


Argotlunar by Micheal Ourednik.

Then at 1:36 the next section begins with gestures created with water sounds again. I used a pipe to blow into a bowl filled with water to create that bubble sound. There is some EQ on it as well to clean up the signal a bit. There is also a quiet suction sound in the background along with the bubbles. I used White Noise Generator on two channels with some automation on its pitch and EQ frequencies.
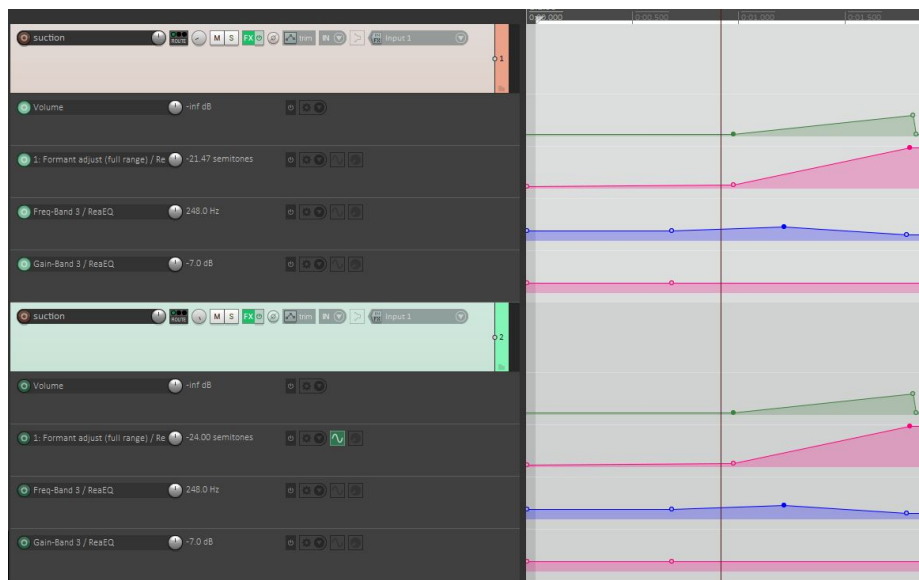

White Noise with Automation.

At 1:40 again the guitar enters with some granular synthesis plugins that I used before. Actually I used the same guitar sections that I played for the previous sections, but I altered them for my needs. At 1:45 the same wave sound that I used in the beginning plays with heavy EQ on it, revealing only the low frequencies as if it's a sound of a school of fish underwater. At 01:48 the sound of the water on tarp plays again with different EQ settings again under some Low Pass filtering and panning. After that at 01:50, the guitar makes another gesture to follow the water sounds. The guitar sounds represent different creatures living under the water. At 01:53 other bubble sounds come in. In the beginning my idea was to implement the sound underwater, then I decided to move out of the boundaries of real life since this is an artwork. Also there is a background sound of Pink Noise to create the soundscape of the underwater. In order to to that I used the the Pink Noise Generator in the Reaper with some EQ, panning and automation.
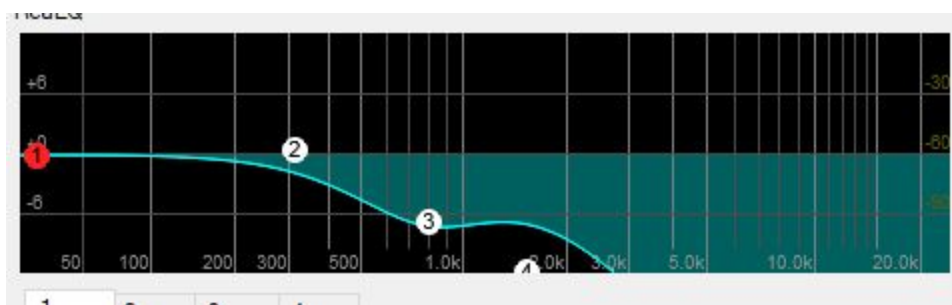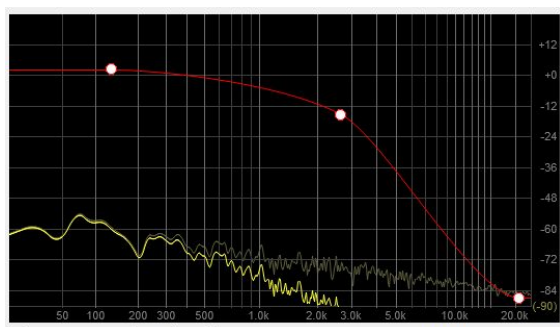
Pink Noise EQ settings. In this case Band 3 is automated to scan through different frequencies. Also the volume varies.
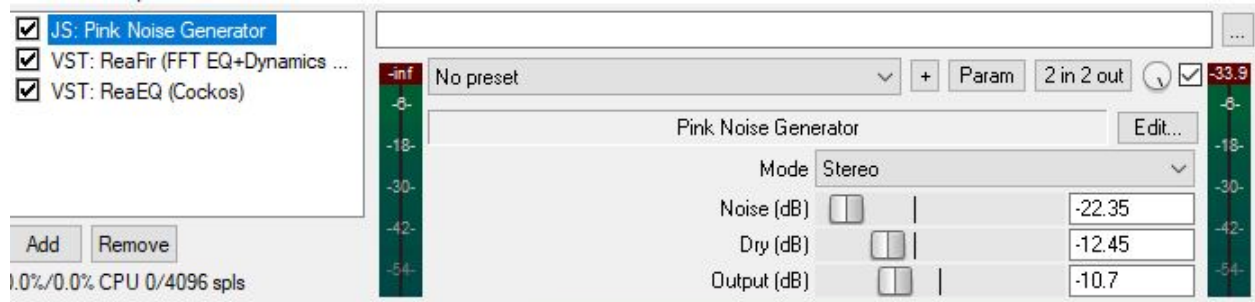
White Noise Generator.

This section of the bickering between the guitar sounds and water sounds continues until 02:14. Then, with a sound coming from the guitar, which goes up to higher frequencies, another section begins at 2:19.

This section is the transition to that part where the antagonist tells the story while he lives it inside his head. Dagon in fact is written from a first person point of view. My intention was to give the feeling of this being written by someone without having a voice over to tell the story. That's why I decided to use pen and paper sounds as if he writes these to his diary. As he turns the pages and takes more notes, he begins to go back his memories and relives his fears. In the background the guitar sound that represents the creature sounds of the sounds that he heard while he was underwater, keeps playing to raise tension. Also some fly sounds also play in the background. The tension breaks at the transition next section.

This section starts at 2:31, which is a calmer section, sort of a break after long more complex sections. This part is a soundscape consisting of different elements such as the sound of the sea, waves washing the coast, a wood creaking which represents a boat floating on the shore, seagulls flying above and some flies flying really close to represent the sound of something dirty and rotten.

Around 2:47 some granular sounds begin to play. These are the sounds of a calcium tablet, dripping to sea, which I also recorded with my Behringer C-1 and I used the same Granular Synthesis Plugin, Argotlunar, to enhance the sound a bit.

At 3:00 a transition to a much bigger space begins, in this case, to create a cave soundscape was my intention. For the eerie atmosphere of the cave I used the same calcium tablet sounds and the sound of a boiling pudding. As for the low frequency base, I used the sounds I made with my table and put some Low-pass Filter on it with some reverb. I was using some Impulse Responses that I found from freesound.org but then I switched using the Impulse Responses provided by Jascha Hagen for the cave.

At 3:14 there is a gesture with the sound of a metallic object. In order to create this increasing, pulsating metallic sound first I recorded a sound of a big metal spoon hitting its holder then I added delay to it and automated the feedback of the delay until it reaches a peak. Then it drops to zero to shut the sound.
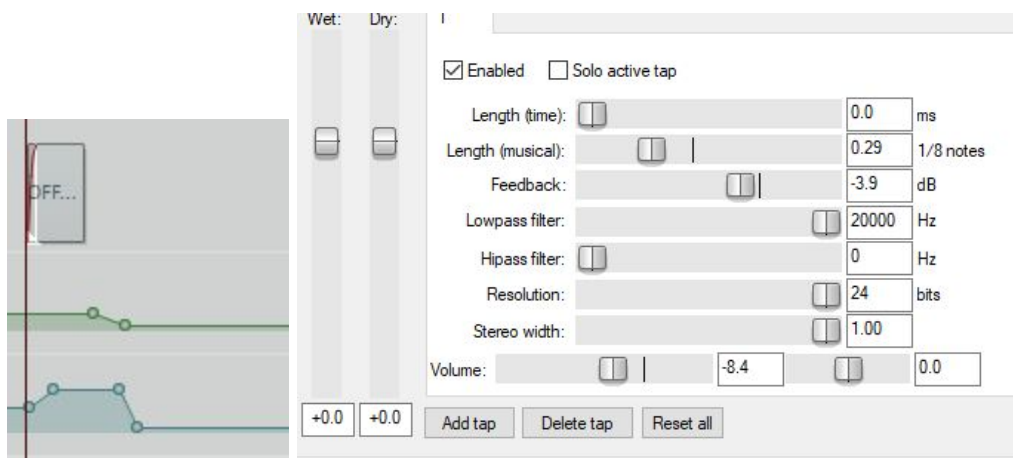
Metallic Spoon Sound - Automation and Delay.

Then, at 3:18 I put a sound which sounds like a horn which represents the sound coming from the old lighthouses. In order to design that menacing lighthouse sound, I used my own voice as the material. Then it was processed into the final result with some reverb, pitch shifting, panning and EQ. The final result was indistinguishable from my voice. There were 2 channels which had different pitches. Together they have a timbre which is brighter.

Tracks of the lighthouse sound.

After the first lighthouse sound, the sound of the seagulls play again. After the second one the water on tarp plays. In the background there are still some fragments of the previous section. For example, the calcium tablet sounds still continue but they are more obscured. After the third and the last lighthouse, there is a small break that starts at 3:41. Again this is the sound of the calcium tablet and the sound of water dripping that I recorded with some reverb on it.

At 3:58 the last section begins with the sound of a match strike followed by the sound of a burning object. For this gesture, I recorded the sound of the matches and some objects that I found at home when I burned them. This section is also soundscape, which is probably the most related part with the story. The Antagonist prepares to write his diary and recall the events that happened to him.

"I cannot think of the deep sea without shuddering at the nameless things that may at this very moment be crawling and floundering on its slimy bed, worshipping their ancient stone idols and carving their own detestable likenesses on submarine obelisks of water-soaked granite. I dream of a day when they may rise above the billows to drag down in their reeking talons the remnants of puny, war-exhausted mankind—of a day when the land shall sink, and the dark ocean floor shall ascend amidst universal pandemonium.

The end is near. I hear a noise at the door, as of some immense slippery body lumbering against it. It shall not find me. God, that hand! The window! The window!"[1]

He writes these last words before he meets his demise. He sits at his table to pick his diary at 4:33. Then he starts writing at 4:45. After a while a bang on the door suddenly becomes hearable, which increases in terms of volume each second. At 5:05 a strange sound is playing. This is the part where he gets haunted by the sound in his head, which belongs to a creature he encountered on that island. To design this creature sound, I simply recorded my own voice, while imitating the sound of something which does not belong to this world. Then I repitched it and put some EQ on it but the trick was to change its playback rate.

---

[1] H.P Lovecraft, *Dagon,* 1919.
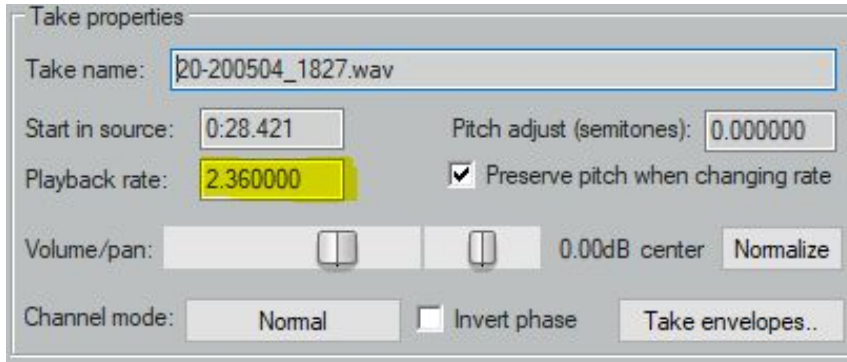
Playback rate change of the track.

After I changed the playback rate it sounded more outlandish and scary. This creature sounds continue until the end of the piece and close the piece as a final gesture.

This piece for me was a great journey to improve my technical skills as well as my composing abilities. In the end the piece ends with an ambiguity about the destiny of the antagonist. It brings up different questions to my mind, "Does the creature really exist?" or "Was everything happening inside his head?".

Bibliography

H.P Lovecraft, *Dagon,* 1919.