

A Ludum Dare Post Mortem
2nd Draft (2016-09-04) by
Phil Strahl

VIDEO	AUDIO
<p>INTRO:</p> <p>Still: Ludum Dare Website, Logo & stuff</p> <p>Youtube: Life of Brian:</p> <p>YouTube: Video of Mike pronouncing his name</p> <p>Still: The website with the LD#36 announcement and discussion.</p> <p>Archive: Footage of me in April</p> <p>Screengrab: Footage of "Mag Gunner", "PONY!" and "Pressure Run."</p> <p>Title: "A Ludum Dare 36 Post Mortem."</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> Ever since the first Ludum Dare event, two things never changed. The first is a constant confusion of how to pronounce it because it's Latin, and Latin is confusing.</p> <p><u>ROMAN GUARD</u> "People called Romanes they go the house"?! <u>OFF</u> The second is that the jam and website are run by Mike Kas-- Mike Kaspr--</p> <p><u>MIKE</u> --Mike Kasprzak--</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Right. This time around, Mike didn't host the event because he's working full time on the site to fix the exploitable voting system until Ludum Dare in December. Thanks to Sorceress and other community members, the jam still took place, although without voting.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> No voting meant less pressure, I concluded, and I was eager to participate since in April I couldn't come up with an idea and gave up.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> My past entries were relatively polished and feature-complete to my initial ideas (except PONY. PONY was different,) so I felt rather confident that I could create something even better without sacrificing sleep, meals, or much of my weekend.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> This is the story of how that turned out; the Post Mortem of my game "6210 B.C."</p>

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<p>DAY 1:</p> <p>Video: At Starbucks, reading Ikari Warriors.</p> <p>Video: Getting into office, shot of clock</p> <p>Video: Keyboard, notepad, screens; playing Pokemon Sliver on GameBoy.</p> <p>Video: Swiping Twitter timeline, surprised, writing.</p> <p>Still: Tweet of me complaining.</p> <p>Screengrab: SCULLY editor.</p> <p>Video: Gaming mags & Atari</p> <p>YouTube: Paradroid on YouTube, GDC Talk snippet, drawing stuff on paper</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> I wanted to start with as much inspiration and motivation I could get before the kick-off and indulged myself with retro gaming magazines before work. The jam officially begins at what's 3 in the morning local time.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Lucky for me, I get home from work just an hour earlier.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> With everything set up, I administered a final dose of inspiration before compulsively checking Twitter for the theme announcement when it was time.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> The theme was "Ancient Technology". And I utterly blacked out. Just like with any theme.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Still, I tried my best to get any stupid little idea out of my system and write it down.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> I started viewing "Ancient Technology" from a perspective of ancient gaming hardware. I looked for inspiration to Retro Gamer, Retro, Making Games, and even the Atari 2600 itself.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Half an hour later, I found myself watching "Paradroid" gameplay on YouTube which didn't get me anywhere. I needed a different approach.</p>

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<p>YouTube: Talk by Asher Vollmer, ~3:47</p> <p>Video: Drawing stuff on my notepad, looking miserable.</p> <p>Video: Me banging my head</p> <p>Cut to Screengrab: Post with GIF on LD</p> <p>Video: Switching off screens</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> I remembered a GDC talk from 2014 by Asher Vollmer about his way of design: Up front, he states four goals for a game and where they all meet -- bam! -- that's your game.</p> <p><u>ASHER VOLLMER</u> So these were all my goals and they really narrowed down my field and then, you know, in the center "Threes" just showed up.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> My four goals quickly became a mind-map which turned into doodles. More than an hour in, all my initial confidence had vanished.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> I was low-spirited and shared my self-pity on Twitter and the LD blog. Knowing that I was not alone in my distress was comforting, at least. Thanks, guys!</p> <p><u>OFF</u> I was gridlocked and tired and retired for the day. Maybe, I thought, an idea would manifest in my dreams; provided I had plenty of sleep.</p>
<p>DAY 2:</p> <p>Video: Entering home office, shots of Minecraft stuff, Yoshi, and Luigi</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> The next day, however, was more of the same. In my dreams that night, I had met Jon Blow. He had had some advice for me, but I just couldn't recall what it was.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Almost 12 hours in and no idea. And just staring at the screen didn't seem that enticing.</p> <p>(beat) I needed a change of scenery,</p>

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Video: Getting up and taking car key	<p><u>OFF</u> So I took Conny out on a lovely ride through the fields and towns of Bavaria. We ended up in a little cafe/restaurant for cake and coffee.</p>
Video: Notepad, pondering over empty page	<p><u>OFF</u> There I got my system properly saturated, caffeinated, and had had my change of scenery but the ideas wouldn't start flowing as I had hoped.</p>
Video: Conny types. Sun, flower pot, and writing	<p><u>OFF</u> At least, Conny was making some progress on her novel as I continued writing down any gameplay fragments that manifested themselves out of thin air.</p>
Animation: Concept as a simple drawing.	<p><u>OFF</u> Then I had it: What if you were a hunter/gatherer throwing stones at your enemies while they had already acquired the technology of spears?</p>
Video: Writing, Steak, Close-ups of concept drawings.	<p><u>OFF</u> Over a piece of cow I contemplated a bit more and came up with a simple premise: In a top-down game, the player had to gather resources and fight enemies so the elders in the village could upgrade the player's weapon or gathering tools. If the player took too long, the enemies would have better-developed weapons. The goal would be to find four pieces of a magical device that would win the technology war --</p>
Still:Nokia 6210	<p><u>OFF</u> (cont'd) -- a Nokia 6210, my first cell phone, itself a piece of ancient technology.</p>
Video: Clock Tower	<p><u>OFF</u> It was 7 in the evening when we left, my head already spinning with implementations and code architecture.</p>

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Video: At the lake	<p><u>OFF</u> During a short stop at the lake, I formulated a mental plan of action. First, I would get player movement ready, then add a player sprite and start with basic combat mechanics. I still had 32 hours and I was confident that everything was possible in that amount of time.</p>
Video: Back at home, making coffee	<p><u>OFF</u> Of course, a little coffee would help in getting in a nice coding flow.</p>
Video: Nightfall	<p><u>OFF</u> Finally, at nightfall, I began actually working on something substantial for a change.</p>
Timelapse: Screen	<p><u>OFF</u> Once I had the basic movement and input set up, I went to Photoshop to explore the style of the graphics. Since I am not good at drawing limbs, noses or mouths, I settled for a simpler approach that worked quite well. I kept adding resource graphics and GUI icons for a rough concept of what the game would look like. It always helps my motivation to code with somewhat nice looking graphics.</p>
Timelapse: Coding, stretching at 3 a.m.	<p><u>OFF</u> 3 am. Half-time. At this point, I had a moving character and a basic UI set up with No-Life-Radio keeping me motivated.</p>
Video: Close up of me looking like shit.	<p><u>OFF</u> A stinging pain just behind my eyeballs would not subside, it only got stronger. One hour it had become a severe migraine that cut my day short at that point. I felt terrible and almost blacked out. Just a few hours of sleep, I thought, would put me back in the ring.</p>

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<p>DAY 3:</p> <p>Video: Morning in Salzburg, clock, kitchen</p> <p>Video: Kitchen and office</p> <p>Video: Yawning in the car</p> <p>Video: Coffee</p> <p>Video: Men in Black</p> <p>Video: Pouring maple syrup over my porridge, dusting off the notepad.</p> <p>Game: Day of the Tentacle</p> <p>Video: Me, writing, then getting into the car.</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> I didn't sleep well. The night was too hot and so after five hours I decided to get up. I still felt like shit.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Only coffee could get me up to speed. And we were out of coffee. Coding without coffee is possible -- but useless.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> I took Conny out for breakfast on that late, sunny Sunday morning. The city was brimming with chipper tourists flooding the streets of the old town of Salzburg, but my system was still in power-save mode.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Finally, I had my coffee and waited for my brain to get up to speed. Coffee wasn't enough. I needed more sugar.</p> <p><u>ALIEN IN EDGAR-SUIT</u> More -- sugar!</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Porridge with maple syrup turned out to be great brain food, since afterwards, I felt like I could -- like I could --</p> <p><u>PURPLE TENTACLE</u> (shouts) Take on the world!</p> <p>(That helped a bit). Somewhat reinvigorated I hurried home to throw myself in the final stages of development as long as the caffeine was still carrying me through.</p>

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Video: Clock, arriving in the office.	<p><u>OFF</u> I knew that my lack of sleep would haunt me with a vengeance later that day, and so I tackled the most annoying part: Text boxes. I hate, hate, hate coding GUIs but there's just no way around it.</p>
Video: 3 p.m.	<p><u>OFF</u> 3 in the afternoon. Only 12 more hours to go. That was the moment I realized that I wouldn't make it. Too much was missing, the combat mechanics not even started, because of the time I had wasted on a rudimentary UI.</p>
Timelapse: Afternoon coding	<p><u>OFF</u> I decided to cut my losses and focus on the resource gathering aspect, at least, and implement randomly placed trees and stone piles with the ability to harvest them.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> When you're in a hurry, bad decisions happen. My half-assed finite state implementation bogged me down as I tried to enable the player to deposit their collected resources in the village. The code was lacking clarity and structure, tangled up in bug-prone dependencies. But I was in the Zone. Perhaps for too long.</p>
Video: Getting up from my desk.	<p><u>OFF</u> Because when I snapped out of it, I realized how hungry I had gotten since breakfast.</p>
Video: Walking through the kitchen	<p><u>OFF</u> There was no chocolate in the drawer--</p>
Video: Fridge	<p>--and the fridge situation was dire, too. A culinary calamity, if you will. Luckily, Conny knew exactly what to do.</p>

VIDEO	AUDIO
Video: Delivery guy, Conny with Pizza	<u>CONNY</u> Essen!
Video: Sitting down with pasta & pizza in front of YouTube.	<u>OFF</u> Pizza tastes so good when delivered and consumed in front of a screen with a funny show on.
Video: Our reaction when eating	<u>JIM STERLING</u> This is the mask that I wear when I *FUCK*.
Video: Last slice	<u>OFF</u> After the last slice I felt considerably better and I should have gotten straight back to coding, despite feeling rather tired.
Video: Balcony	<u>OFF</u> But, well, there still was dessert, you know?
Video: Last sunrays	<u>OFF</u> With the last sunrays of Sundays I returned to the prospect of a hefty crunch time.
Video: Clock	<u>OFF</u> 8:30 -- 6 and a half hours to go. The lack of sleep that whole week caught up with me. I could hardly keep my eyes open.
Video: Me looking wasted	<u>OFF</u> From experience I knew that any code I wrote when overly tired would be a tangled mess of unreadable code. That's the last thing you when hunting bugs until the last minute.
Video: Stumbling towards the bedroom	<u>OFF</u> Having a power nap would be best way to avoid this. I was too far behind anyway. Another twenty minutes wouldn't matter.

VIDEO	AUDIO
<p>DAY 4:</p> <p>Video: Me, stumbling back to the office</p> <p>Video: Clock</p> <p>Timelapse:</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> I overslept. By three hours. Of course. But at least I felt powered enough for the short home stretch.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> 2 and a half hours left. With so much missing from my initial idea, I was forced to concentrate my efforts to elevate the current build to anything beyond a walking simulator.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> I abandoned the combat mechanics entirely and instead focused on equipment-upgrades when the player had collected and delivered a specific amount of resources.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> I quickly added loose resources such as single stones and twigs. Those could get picked up without any tools. Trees and stone-piles demanded technology upgrades first, so that was the whiff of game-mechanics I could muster.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> With one hour to go, I crossed into panic territory: I had neglected actual work on the upgrade mechanic for too long. Now I blanked out on how to implement it the best way in the code I had up to that point.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> For 10 long minutes I just fumbled around, littering the code with ugly hacks until I had a threadbare implementation. It was as CS teacher's nightmare and spawned new bugs like Zerglings. I squashed them one by one, running out of precious time.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> The final bug I tackled was the the worst because it sabotaged</p>

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<p>FINAL THOUGHTS:</p> <p>FADE IN.</p> <p>Screengrab: "6210 B.C." gameplay</p> <p>Screengrab: Mag Gunner; Age of Empires</p> <p>Screengrab: Ludum Dare Website</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> I felt content that I still made the deadline, but I am not satisfied with the game. I had to cut too much. In its current state there is no challenge, no goal, and no interesting, novel mechanic.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> While my game for Ludum Dare #33, "Mag Gunner," has some potential beyond the jam, "6210 B.C." definitely does not. (It sits somewhere between "Don't Starve" and a very casual "Age of Empires"). It adds nothing new to the mix. Not ending up outside the box bugs me.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Was it a vain effort then? No. With each new jam event I learn something new about game design, programming, about myself. I know that I am not 21 anymore when I could work straight for 50 hours.</p> <p>Better time and sleep management should go a long way in the next event. And some restraint when creating the art.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Ludum Dare #37 is set to be in December, with the new website and all. I am looking forward to participating and to hating the theme like the times before.</p>

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OFF

Maybe, I thought, an idea would manifest itself in my dreams; provided I had plenty of sleep.

OFF

There I got my system properly satiated, caffeinated, and had had my change of scenery but the ideas wouldn't start flowing as I had hoped.

OFF

Only coffee could get me up to speed. And we were out of coffee. Coding without coffee is possible -- but useless.

OFF

A minute past the deadline. In my desperation I tacked the Mother of Unholy Hacks on top of it all which magically fixed it. I hope. Hey, I had made it. Somehow.

OFF

Making the little icon for the game was almost relaxing. But as I took some screenshots I realized that the game didn't spawn enough resources for the second upgrade! I hope it was still within the rules to tweak the one variable responsible and re-compile the game.

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Was it a vain effort then? No. With each new jam event I learn something new about game design, programming, about myself.

I know that I am not 21 anymore when I could work straight for 50 hours.

Better time and sleep management should go a long way in the next event. And a little less dining out.

OFF

Ludum Dare #37 is set to be in December and I am looking forward to it. I already hate the theme.