

Ludum Dare #37: Post Mortem of The Cellar
(Final Draft)

By

Phil Strahl

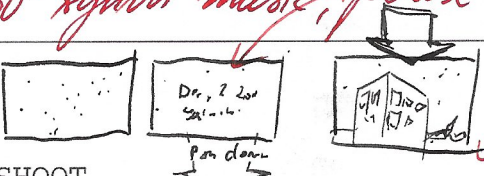
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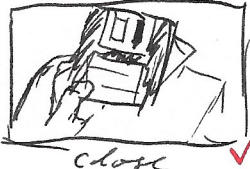
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To Do :

- ☐ ○ Intro montage
- ☐ ● Grunts in Heybrand
- ☐ ● Floppy Disk insert
- ☐ ○ Schedule animation p. 3
- ☐ ● "Planning feels like productivity"
- ☐ ● "No caffeine" p. 4
- ☐ ● Subtitles p. 7
- Saturday ☐ ● Lawyer scene p. 9
- ☐ ● SNES games p. 10
- ☐ ● Recording parking garage atmo
- ☐ ● Typewriter montage
- ☐ ○ ~~(more night driving stuff)~~ ~~Oh! I'll have an idea~~
- ☐ ● Game recording full playthrough.
- ☐ ○ Animation: Schedule revisited
- ☐ ● "La-la-la"
- ☐ ● Bridge I } p. 11
- ☐ ● Bridge II }
- ☐ ● "Weird grammar" p. 6
- ☐ ● Nyan-cat
- ☐ ● "Inevitable" p. 16
- ☐ ● "Too long on polishing" p. 18
- ☐ ● Happy ... looking at results.
- ☐ ● Mouse click sound
- ☐ ● Game Conapt
- ☐ ● "Ghostbusters!"

VIDEO	AUDIO
<p>INTRO:</p> <p>Clipshow</p> <p><i>Repl: Dam-dam-da-da-da! ♪ →</i></p>	<p><u>OFF</u> This Ludum Dare, I thought I had everything going for me. A clean desk, a plan, and a resolution -- to lay off the coffee for a bit, and I was strangely optimistic that the theme would not <u>suck</u> for once. There was only a minor annoyance: I had to work on Sunday. Surely, this wouldn't pose a problem.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Or would it?</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Witness the story of a man on the edge, a man trying to overcome his caffeine addiction for two days, as he toils to finish his Lovecraftian prototype for Ludum Dare 37. Witness "The post-mortem of "The Cellar"..."</p>
<p>TITLE SEQUENCE:</p>	<p><i>80's synth music, please!</i></p>
<p>EXTERIOR SHOT OF MEDIA HOUSE AT NIGHT?:</p> <p>INSERT "2 Days to the jam"</p>	<p></p> <p><u>SHOOT</u> (media house at night)</p> <p><u>OFF</u> (December always is a busy time of year for me, so planning and preparation are half the battle.)</p>
<p>THEME VOTING:</p> <p>Me, in the color suite, rating stuff.</p> <p>Me, down-voting most of it.</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> It's no secret that I hated each theme so far. This time around, I intended to do something about it. During some downtime at work, I set out to partake in the last rounds of theme voting.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> It wasn't pretty, still I did my duty as a voter and tried to ward off the worst offenders.</p>

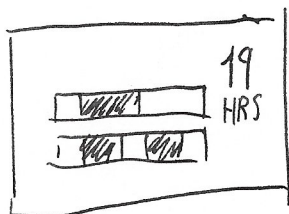
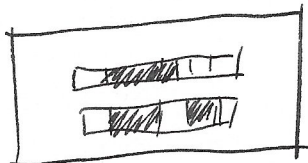
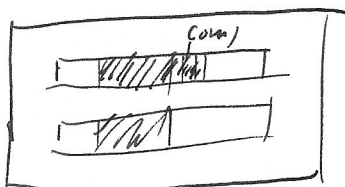
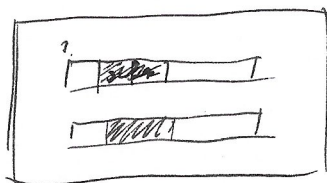
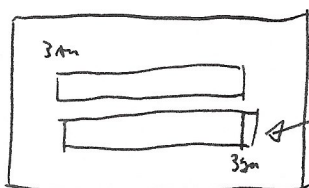
VIDEO	AUDIO
<p>TYPEWRITER:</p> <p>Me, showing off my typewriter object</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> It is within the rules to use pre-existing code of yourself, as long as you make its source available with the rest of your code.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Shortly before the jam, I worked on a little something that I always wanted to get right: A very customizable typewriter script to print an input string character by character and plays a sound. Whatever the theme would be, my entry would have some on-screen text.</p>
<p>DESK CLEANING:</p> <p>INSERT "1 Day until the jam"</p> <p>Shots of a dirty desk.</p> <p>Me, starting to clean up the mess.</p> <p>Cleaning up the whiteboard</p> <p>Me, picking up a 3.5" floppy disk</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> Over the course of many weeks, my home office has become a giant accumulator of just ... stuff; books, BluRays, printouts, cables, and remnants of snacks long past. My desk had seen the worst of it.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Initially, I figured a little dusting off would do, but the months of not caring had allowed fractal layers of entropy to (thrive and) propagate.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> I couldn't even recall what the ancient schematics on my whiteboard once meant.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> The deeper down I ventured into the past, familiarity faded and eventually I produced artifacts of a culture long obsolete, (ancient bytes on a floppy disk).</p>  <p>close ✓</p>

VIDEO

AUDIO

Screencap: Desktop

PLANNING:



OFF

Once I was finished in the realm of actual things, I continued cleaning up the virtual. Nothing should distract me on either desktop from focusing entirely on making my game.

OFF

For the first time for a jam, I drew up a proper schedule to manage my time the most effective way.

OFF

Ideally, there are 48 hours to work on the game and another for submitting it. I couldn't use them all.

OFF

First, I wanted to get eight hours of sleep each day. I had no intentions of becoming a coding zombie by the end of the jam and the start of an intense workweek.

OFF

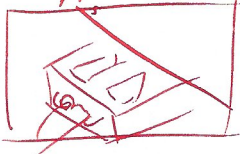
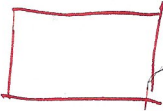
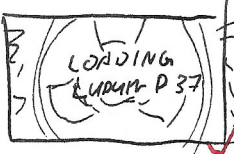
Then, I wanted to save at least an hour or two for quality time with Conny, (plus two hours of driving and searching for a parking spot).

OFF

Lastly, I had to include a big, eight-hour long chunk--plus traveling time--right before the deadline; (a job I had on Sunday out of town. Whatever game I would have, it was critical for it to be feature complete before leaving.

OFF

The time between these blocks I had for making my game, 3 for the concept, 12 for art and coding, 2 for testing and another 2 for the final polish -- 19 hours in total.

VIDEO	AUDIO
<p>?:</p> <p><i>Coffee Power?</i></p> 	<p><i>Cut?</i></p> <p><u>OFF</u> Having a plan like this is great because it feels my degree in Project Management was not entirely pointless. And it lets you put a number on everything. You're not just "a bit lagging", you're "4 hours and 35 minutes" behind. Planning feels almost like being productive. This was almost too easy.</p>
<p>PUTTING AWAY COFFEE:</p> <p><i>More Difficult?</i></p> 	<p><u>OFF</u> Let's up the ante: No caffeine. My creativity doesn't hinge on chemical stimulants and my sleep should be much more restorative. Piece of cake.</p>
<p>GAME: DUKE NUKEM 3D:</p>	<p><u>DUKE</u> Yeah! Piece of Cake!</p> 
<p>DAY 1 - NIGHT:</p> <p>Insert: 1 hour to to the jam.</p> <p>Me, entering my office</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> At that point, routine steered my actions: Coming home from work with an hour to spare, playing some good games to get in the right mood. As always, the theme would be announced at 3 A.M. local time to officially launch the competition. And I had my plan.</p> <p><u>SHOOT</u> (3DS, playing Zelda)</p> <p><u>OFF</u> But as soon as you have a plan, Microsoft throws you a curve</p>

VIDEO	AUDIO
	ball.
CLIP: STEVE BALLMER:	<u>STEVE</u> YEAH!!!
HOME OFFICE:: Windows Update Clicking update, checking Twitter. Writing theme on the wall Impressions. Phil looking miserable. <i>Coffee montage</i>	<u>OFF</u> 2:57 a.m. and Windows reaaaaally wanted to install some updates. (Sure, I could have postponed it but I didn't want to risk forgetting about it and having my machine force-reboot unexpectedly during the hardest crunch time.) <u>OFF</u> *sigh* It could only take a few minutes, right? I would catch up. In the meantime, I checked Twitter for the theme, as usual. <u>OFF</u> It was "One Room". Its announcement reliably wiped my brain like the update was wiping my custom settings right then. Once Windows had finished soiling itself, I had to face the music. <u>OFF</u> Crap. I needed coffee already. <u>OFF</u> To numb the craving, I fueled up on coconut water and honey-coated cashews to attract the kiss of a muse. She didn't show up, probably she was busy kissing all the other devs right then. <u>OFF</u> I turned to Atari artworks for inspiration and while it was fun thumbing through the pages, I increasingly became bummed out at

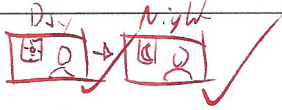

VIDEO	AUDIO
<p>Screen capture of Scully text editor</p> <p>Me in bed, worrying</p>	<p>how much my own art sucked in comparison. ✓</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Reliably, I hit rock bottom again and I declared creative bankruptcy: ✓</p> <p><u>OFF</u> "Fuck it, let's just make a little top-down shooter", despite never actually having made a top-down shooter, never having had particular fun playing one, nor really looking forward to the prospect of coding one. (Hell, why not throw in micro-transactions, as well?) The ideal mindset for a shit game. ✓</p> <p><u>OFF</u> According to my schedule, I should have gone to bed with a solid concept and a roadmap in place, but in reality, I couldn't sleep and racked my brains for ... well, *something* underneath nagging self doubts. ✓</p>
<p>DAY 2:</p> <p>Establisher, packing things up, driving to Europark.</p> <p><i>lost</i></p>	<p><u>OFF</u> At least, I had kept to my schedule when it came to sleep duration,</p> <p>(OFF) (, regrettably devoid of weird dream quests with famous game devs giving me advice. Why didn't they throw me a bone?! Warren? Ron? Not even you, Jon?) ✓</p> <p><u>OFF</u> The weather was mockingly cheerful, sunny, and way too warm for mid-December, the well of my creativity still dry. I re-read the notes from the night before, trying to find something in them I had not seen before. All I found was a bunch of typos and weird grammar. ✓</p> <p><u>OFF</u></p>

VIDEO	AUDIO
STARBUCKS:	<p><u>OFF</u> The situation called for a celebratory coffee before heading home. I know, I know, just a small one. (Fine, "Make it grande.") <i>— correct</i></p> <p><u>OFF</u> I was a little behind to get back to coding but at least I had an inkling of how to start.</p>
<p>DAY 2 - NIGHT:</p> <p>At work on my computer</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> As I have mentioned in my prior videos, I just can't work with featureless placeholders. I was well aware that I wasted precious coding time but that's just how I roll. (I have learned nothing.)</p>
PHOTOSHOP:	<p><u>OFF</u> As a nod to Lovecraft, I loosely based my character on his likeness, within my ability, and animated a little walkcycle.</p>
BOOKSHELF::	<p><u>OFF</u> The whole ghost story theme was right in my ballpark, being a huge Lovecraft fan. Like tremendously huge. I discovered his works through playing the original "Alone in the Dark", and I even made a video about him a couple of years back, check it out if you want. So let's say, I have a slight affinity for the Weird.</p>

VIDEO	AUDIO
<p>APOLOGY:</p> <p>PHIL, standing in front of a wall, a lawyer next to him, handing a piece of paper with a formal apology.</p> <p>PHIL looks at LAWYER, LAWYER points to some more text on the sheet PHIL is holding.</p> <p>LAWYER displays no reaction.</p> <p><i>what?</i></p> <p>PHIL looks to LAWYER, LAWYER nods, and Phil begins slapping procedure.</p>	<p><u>PHIL</u> (sheet of paper in hand) On behalf of animators worldwide, I hereby apologize for using the term "walkcycle" to describe my infantile scrawls, which are not, and never can be, on par with or even close to the work of any real animator. Any claims I had made prior that I, quote, "animated", unquote, are thereby false, unsubstantiated, and I deeply regret my misleading choice of words.</p> <p><u>PHIL</u> (to LAWYER) Do I have to?</p> <p><u>PHIL</u> (sighs) With profound humility, I will now proceed to shamefully -- shamefully! -- <u>slap</u> myself with my copies of "The Animator's Survival Kit" and "The Illusion of Life".</p>
<p>PAINTING IN PHOTOSHOP:</p> <p>Snippets from video, animation in sprite editor.</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> So let's just say I drew some poses that when played back in succession looked vaguely like a person walking.</p>
<p>DAY 2 - NIGHT:</p> <p>Working</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> Next up was character movement and having Howard interact with the environment. Enabling the player character to move around was pretty straight forward, but the conceptual setup of object interaction was initially a bit cumbersome.</p>



VIDEO	AUDIO
Bug when colliding with rune.	<p><u>OFF</u> After some back and forth I settled on having each environmental object own the lines they would prompt the character to say upon interaction. I lost some time with untangling my code and weeding out all the fruitless approaches. But investing in legibility saves you headaches when the deadline is looming over you.</p>
<p>WOB" SOUND IN GAMES:</p> <p>Footage from Starfox, Jurassic Park ?</p> <p>???</p>	<p><u>OFF</u></p> <p>I always found it very charming how some old 16-bit games voiced their characters with a little sample that roughly hinted at the speaker's character.</p>
<p>HOME OFFICE:</p> <p>PHIL, recording his voice and editing it.</p> <p>Midnight approaches</p> <p>Ginger sip.</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> I wanted to that too. And my typewriter object supported this, I just had to record a sample.</p> <p><u>PHIL</u> Wob!</p> <p><u>OFF</u> So I kept polishing this basic object interaction with the text prompt, (instead of implementing the ghost catching stuff, but that's okay. Because I am terrible at sticking to priorities.)</p> <p><u>OFF</u> With some ginger beer desperately substituting for coffee, I kept on adding different kinds of interactable objects to my stilted character in a blue void.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> The chunk of time I scheduled for that night would be the only</p>

VIDEO	AUDIO
<p>A * ... <i>wasting the time I needed to</i></p> <p>B * ... <i>Could I still make a ghost-catching mechanic?</i> <i>It was was ^{hardly} possible. But instead of buckling up, I</i></p> <p>* ... <i>while neglecting any actual work (programming)</i></p> <p>* ... <i>ignoring both deadline and player experience. But the walls looked nice...</i></p>	<p>chance I had to get the bulk of programming done, so I had to make it count. As I toiled on the code, a sublime horror was creeping up on me. I knew of its <i>existence</i> but consciously ignored it. Its name was gameplay.</p> <p>OFF I had no idea how to pull off this whole ghost busting and combat system in the time I still had, nor where to start, so to keep the illusion of feeling productive, I just nudged tiles around to make everything look real pretty, *</p>
<p>THIS IS FINE:</p> <p>PHIL sits in a burning room with a silly hat, sips coffee, looks stupidly calm and happy.</p>	<p>PHIL This is fine.</p>
<p>HOME OFFICE:</p> <p>* "I needed to play to my strengths and find a <i>... and make it sparkle ^{crappy} with the least effort."</i></p> <p>* "So: <i>How</i> What's the simplest trick in the bag for atmosphere?"</p> <p>Activating torch object.</p>	<p>OFF At 3 a.m. it was halftime again. Let's take inventory: I had a yapping character that you could steer around and a room with too detailed, yet incredibly drab walls. Instead of merrily painting away on the tilemap for the walls, I should have spent more effort on designing a good floor plan. Literally the first, boring layout I did, never changed.</p> <p>* OFF With so much time lost on <i>misguided polish</i> debugging, I needed to play to my strengths and make the game as moody and atmospheric as I could.</p> <p><i>Let's possible catch up</i></p>


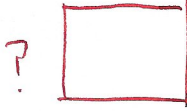
VIDEO	AUDIO
<p>HOME OFFICE, DAYLIGHT:</p> <p>PHIL sits in his sun-filled office, talking to the camera.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">  </p> <p><u>PHIL</u> The cheap and easy way to make something spooky is to just turn off the lights.</p>
<p>HOME OFFICE, NIGHT:</p> <p>The camera hasn't moved, neither did PHIL, but it's now night and it looks ominous and creepy.</p>	<p><u>PHIL</u> And that's exactly what I did.</p>
<p>SCREENGAB TORCHLIGHT:</p> <p>Implementing simple torch</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> While my implementation of the torchlight is amateurish at best, it got the job done.</p>
<p>MUSIC:</p> <p>Insert "4:20 A.M."</p> <p>Phil is setting up Keyboard</p> <div data-bbox="117 1212 705 1561">  <p><i>Parking Garage with really cool sound!</i></p> </div> <p>Playing the game with sound</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> The other necessary ingredient of mood is sound. <u>I wanted to record a howling, droning atmosphere in the parking garage, but then again, I didn't want to get up into the cold garage to care the first commuters on their way to their cars. Music alone would have to suffice.</u></p> <p><u>OFF</u> I fired up Reason and my keys and toyed around with it for a good hour until I had a usable loop to put in the game.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> With the new assets in place, Howard sounded way too cheerful and cutesy and clashed with what had become a dark game rather quickly.</p>

VIDEO	AUDIO
Recording the sounds from typewriter	<p><u>OFF</u> As another homage to the game's literary inspiration, I decided an actual old-timey typewriter stroke would be the best fit.</p>
<p>TYPEWRITER:</p> <p>Typewriter presentation, pans & focus shifts. ✓</p>	<p>15 a</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Of course, we have one of these around. This portable typewriter from the 1930s and I typed away on it before getting my hands on a Commodore 64. It's an heirloom of my dear grandfather and I still enjoy typing on it from time to time. I just love how it sounds and feels. ✓</p> <p><i>my first comp</i></p>
HOME OFFICE:	<p><u>OFF</u> <i>When rec. sound,</i> It's good practice to record more than you think you need because more often than not, you end up using every scrap of what you got. Once I had covered pretty much all of the moving parts, I didn't even stop when closing it up, even recording the creaking handle on the case.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> <i>typewr.'s</i> I edited my Foley in Audacity and experimented a little with it, tried different effects and some layering. A stroke, played back at a quarter of its original speed, with some reverb made for a great, snappy "flipping the switch" sound. And the handle creak, treated similarly on top became the sound of the portal opening. ✓</p> <p><i>made</i></p>

VIDEO	AUDIO
SCREENCAP "HUBERT" FONT:	<p><u>OFF</u> The sound effects fit perfectly with the text which didn't come as a surprise: The font I used in the game, I had made from this very typewriter's types almost 15 years ago. I had named it after my dear grampa, Hubert.</p>
HOME OFFICE: Close to 7	<p><u>OFF</u> (The clock was approaching 7 A.M. fast and I was past my scheduled bed time. But I was rather smug with the framework I had so far. Nice sound, bearable graphics, interactive objects, and a text system. It was feature complete. Only the actual game was missing. Still.</p>
GOING TO BED: Bedroom, PHIL looks miserable, can't sleep.	<p><u>OFF</u> As I went to bed, I once again had troubles falling asleep. I was worrying about how and where to cram some game mechanics in. And what they should be.</p>
DAY 3 - AFTERNOON: Shit weather, 4 p.m. Advent Calendar	<p><u>OFF</u> Sunday, 4 in the afternoon, 11 hours to go. The weather was dreary and a good fit for my sinking spirits. Our advent calendar cheered me up, though.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> The 11th of December meant it was my turn again to open the gift bag Conny had prepared for me. It contained a bar of soap, handmade by Conny, a chocolate gingerbread man, and a gamepad made out of chocolate.</p> <p><u>OFF</u></p>

VIDEO	AUDIO
	almost forgot my camera. (Thanks, coffee!) ✓
<p>DRIVING OFF, ACCELERATING:</p> <p>Driving off from Grödig, highway at night.</p> 	<p><u>OFF</u> I left the place as empty as I had entered it seven hours prior and vanished into the night, with not a lot more than three hours left to the deadline.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Driving on deserted roads through the darkness on a relentless timer felt surreal and, in hindsight, was like roleplaying Yahtzee's game, "The Consuming Shadow". ✓</p>
<p>GAME: CONSUMING SHADOW:</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> I was now the lone paranormal investigator, I was the poor soul trying to fend off the inevitable while gradually losing his mind the more he learns about what he got himself into. ✓</p>
<p>BACK HOME:</p> <p>Closing eyes, taking a deep breath.</p>  <p>"SUCH ZEN!"</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> Back home I stocked up on coconut water, placed myself at the screens but forced myself to slow down, to concentrate, to recalibrate myself for what was ahead. <i>sat down</i></p> <p><u>OFF</u> There still was enough time to make this work. Two minutes to midnight. I could do this. I could make a game out of this mess. ✓</p>

VIDEO	AUDIO
<p>HOME OFFICE::</p> <p>"2 Minutes 2 Midnight" montage</p> <p><i>Tell Seph to work Maiden!</i></p> <p><i>•••</i> <i>◇</i> <i>•••</i> <i>22</i></p>	<p><u>OFF</u> It was then, on a whim, that I decided on a very simple toggling puzzle: ✓</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Each symbol represents a different aspect or deity and all the player had the goal to "open the portal", and a nebulous clue. Players would need to inspect all symbols and learn eldritch lore to operate the correct switches. ✓</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Coming up with those little pieces was the most fun creative writing I had in months and within five minutes I had all the necessary strings in the game. ✓</p> <p><u>OFF</u> There was Seph Cassius, the prophet of mosaics, never right but also never quite wrong; Yar-Kub-Re, sun goddess with two servants; or the never ending, never beginning, the eternal Zu. ✓</p>
	<p><u>OFF</u> In my crunch mode I crammed some performance-guzzling hacks into my code to make the game work until submission hour. ✓</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Too short on time, I went back and forth between writing the description and coding the final touches so it wouldn't crash and be beatable. I had to compile and upload twice because I forgot to switch off the debugging overlays and cheats. Of course. ✓</p> <p><u>OFF</u> In good tradition, I made a little icon and a title card for the LD website, re-compiled everything with the icon in place and re-uploaded it. It was done. God, was I done... ✓</p> <p>EADT 0828</p>

VIDEO	AUDIO
	<p>I wrestle with making my prototype with a moving character into a game with actual mechanics. Each Each time I don't really have a fail state. Each Each time I am underwhelmed with the outcome. And And each time the game is very different to my initial vision due to the number of concessions I was forced to make.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> <i>was well over</i> I knew I had another game that wasn't fun to play, my only chance was that the atmosphere kept people's interest for long enough to evaluate the game. <i>what was the</i></p>
<p>RATING:</p> <p>Screengrab of ratings</p>  	<p><u>OFF</u> Once the ratings where in, I was more than pleasantly surprised to see my game in the top 10 in Mood and in the top 20 in Sound! I liked my atmosphere but I never thought people found it *that* good. Wow. Thanks!</p> <p><u>OFF</u> With that positive feedback through the voting, I might even pick up it again, expand the game and try to find something original in it.</p> <p><u>OFF</u> For example, I am thinking about a game whose puzzles and clues are procedurally generated from a large number of different components, not just plain, hard-coded switches.</p>
<p>CLOSING:</p>	<p><u>OFF</u> For the future, I am a little worried that I might get stuck in my trodden tracks, given my very similar experiences. I worry that an LD jam becomes like a routine</p>

VIDEO	AUDIO
	<p>job for me to churn out terribly boring, unoriginal games ... but with nice music. Maybe I shake things up a bit the next time. Or maybe it was just the lack of coffee. ✓</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Yeah. That's probably it. ✓</p> <p><u>OFF</u> Or maybe the theme just SUCKED! ✓</p>
<p>CREDITS:</p> <p><i>Conny</i> <i>Seph</i> <i>me</i></p>	