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Written by Selectanovel of Moods Plateau

Time for a change

Being not exactly part of the Scene for a long time, a certain pattern has already come into effect: Breakpoint during Easter holidays, Maximum Overdose one month thereafter, Evoke in Summer and then some Amiga meeting in October. Maybe another private meeting with the Gnumpf-Posse bunch or an occasional party like TRSAC or 15 Years Oxyron happening during winter time.

Time for a change! Assembly had always been a mystery for me. You don't happen to meet a lot of Finns in Germany. But when I first visited Breakpoint in 2004, a picture formed in my head that Assembly would actually be the source of demoscening. For some reason, the name of that party had already been in my mind 10 years ago when I didn't even know what the scene exactly was about. So here I decided: Assembly in Helsinki is the Mekka that every scener once in his life had to pilgrimage to.

Sure, I know people who are 15 years in the scene and say, why the hell should I trip that far in order to visit a gigantic gamer joint? Answer: To have been to Assembly, the queen of all demoparties. And to Boozembly of course.

When Browallia/Nukleus told me on Easter that he would definitely go this year, my plans took shape. This year I wouldn't go to Evoke - which was sad as odds to meet my Moodsplateau mates this year would thereby tend til zero. Then again, it was the nonrecurring chance to meet MdS-musician Raztaman in person. Fair enough!

Roadtrip!

As I don't like flying and wanted to add a bit of adventure, I decided to go on a road trip in my Opel Corsa. But who would accompany me? After some convincing emails, Curt Cool agreed happily that I could stay at his place in Copenhagen and a bit later also decided to join the journey. A friend and fellow student of mine, Olli, had been living in Helsinki during an Erasmus exchange. That's where he also met his girlfriend who now lives in Copenhagen. Not much thinking needed - he just had to join us!



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With some delay (business as usual) we took off in Hamburg on Monday, riding the way up to Denmark on the legendary European Motorway 45. Crossed Lillebelt's bro and its big brother, the breathtakingly impressive bridge over the big belt from Fyn to Zealand. In Copenhagen, I dropped Olli off at his darling's place and headed over to CurtCool's and his girlfriend's apartment where we talked and drank beer the whole evening.

Schweden

The trunk filled with luggage and "cheap" Danish beer (compared to Swedish prices at least) we went over the Oresund Bridge Tuesday noon and drove 540 kilometers through... SCHWEDEN (screaming "Sweden" and pronouncing it in German even when talking English became a running gag during our ride - don't ask why)! Never having been to this country I was not only impressed by the vast extent of that nordic kingdom but also of the fact that the Swedes actually drive much more Germanly then they do in Denmark (i.e. flashing from behind when you try to overtake a lorry at speed limit)... Still, after a refueling, my little Opel drove us all the way up, uncomplaining, from Malmoe in the south to the beautiful lake by Joenkoepping to Stockholm, where we arrived in the evening. At the main trainstation we picked up Browallia and went to his place where we did some prepartying again. Unfortunately, he was therefore not able to finish his entry - a picture drawn on the Amiga. Having his apartment paved with airmatresses, we zonked out, looking forward to the ferry trip on the next day.

On Wednesday afternoon, after CurtCool, Olli and I had done some minor sightseeing (raher extensive breakfasting) in Stockholm while Brow was at work, we took a cab to the place where the ferries to Helsinki take off. I wouldn't need my car in Helsinki so I left it in front of Browallia's apartment - leaving a note in the window that the automat wouldn't let me pay for more than two days and that I was really sorry for that. In front of the ferry we met Pumba/Traktor. He is the reason for why I'm actually more interested in learning Amos than ASM now, but that's another story.

Sceners on a boat

5 men on a boat, all Amiga sceners (well, Olli is rather neutral in that matter), lots of beer and a great view on the city of Stockholm which slowly dissapeared on the horizon. Going through a thousand islands in the craggy coast before Stockholm, I was fascinated watching the immense individual motor boat traffic in that area and wondered how much one of those tiny islands would cost and if I'd be allowed to erect a giant casino tower on it.

We enjoyed the most beautiful sunset, talked about previous parties and exchanged stories about the scene or whatever popped into our minds. At this time, having already seen so much, I was really happy about my decision to go to Assembly. And it hadn't even started yet! We also met some Swedish PC-sceners who were heading to Assembly as well.



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When it got colder after a while, we went below to have a beer in the entertainment area. There was some horrible karaoke going on in Swedish and Finnish language. As usual on those occasions, it's mostly the old, ugly, drunk people who grab the microphone in order to sing so off-key that it's always on the edge between "totally laughing your ass off" and "feeling embarrassed for someone else's behaviour" (for the Germans: "fremdschaemen"). However, even the best shows are over some time and while Browallia and CurtCool went to the disco in order to tease some underage females, Olli, Pumba and I tried to find some place to sleep. Continuing Uncle Scrooge's tradition, we had refused to book a cabin - and did the real demoscene sleeping on the floor under some bench in some lobby. After the spanish flamenco band had left the place, I fell asleep for some 30 minutes before the good-looking but authoritative charlady manoeuvred her Hoover around my aching head. Another 30 minutes later I decided that sticking to the sun was reasonable and got up. The others imitated me, but fell asleep again at some cozier place near the slotmachines.

On my own, I went around on deck to find a nice place for smoking a cigarette. It was great to discover the huge boat without those masses of tourists who had populated it throughout the day. Finally, I decided that it was too windy outside for smoking and found a gangway inside that was the designated smokers area. I lit up my cigarette when I realised that those two Swedish PC-sceners who we already had met yesterday on deck were sitting in front of me - one of them completely wasted, lying on the side, the other one happily opening another beer and smiling at me. Very slowly and thoughtfully he then started to explain his new voxelengine he's currently working on. I was totally amazed, I mean, now looking at the floor here and it's not just a texture but three dimensional voxels, I mean...!

You know you are a demoscener when:

- you are completely hungover when you
- on a ferry to Helsinki
- talk to some Swedish guy
- at seven o'clock in the morning
- about voxelspace engines
- and try to understand it

When he realised my long response delay and my helpless gaze, he said "let's go get some bitches" and disappeared. It's a pity I couldn't keep his (nick)name in memory.

"Do you know where you are?" - "Yes. Helsinki."

At 11 something AM we arrived at the Helsinki port. Guided through public transport by Oliver, we arrived at the party place another 30 minutes later and started queuing before the magnificent Hartwall Arena, ready to show our Olsdschool tickets.

"Can I have a look into your suitcase please?" Of course she could. "Any sharp things? Drugs? Alcohol?" Nope, Ma'am, not at all! "Thank you, good bye." Damn, bitch! Why are you not checking my backpack?? A backpack that could have been filled with liquor and beer and you don't even realise that! Then again, if I would have tried it, she most certainly would have checked it. That's Murphy's



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law, a very mainstream one, but applicable. Curt Cool put his beer and booze in a locker at the trainstation and managed to smuggle two beers into the party hall. On his way back to the hall, he met Rztaman/Moodsplateau, my groupmate who had produced a jazzy tune for my not so serious karate production "I has a demomaker", which had ranked 5th at this year's Amiga Democompo at Breakpoint. Luckily, I later managed to catch him in the hall, where he was wearing the moodplateau shirt, and chatted a bit with him about demoscene and real life stuff. Hope you can manage to get to Breakpoint some time, Razta!

Anyways, there we were - at the biggest Demoscene event of them all. Well, at least the biggest computer party I had yet been to. We went straight to the oldschool area - without a seat ticket though, but as the room wasn't filled yet, we picked a table at the back and called it our headquarter for the next few days. Curt Cool and me had the only beers inside and toasted to our successful arrival.

Wandering through the oldschool area, I got immediately disappointed, as, first, I didn't know anyone (except of a heavily busy Blueberry/Loonies, working on his PC 4K) and, second, most of the "demosceners" there were in fact playing games like all the other 4800 visitors. There were discussions in the mailinglist about that you can't enforce that oldschool ticket buyers would do demoscenish stuff. That's true and during the event, a lot of prejudices I had before gamers vanished, as they were really paying a lot of attention to the demoscene part of the party, respecting the sceners and they were in general more interested in that creative stuff than I would have imagined. Still, the cozy, familiar feeling that parties like Breakpoint or Evoke or any demoscene party where you go to alone without knowing anybody provide, was hurtfully missing. When your friends are away and you go out to smoke a cigarette at Breakpoint, you just go to a group standing nearby who's talking in English and you instantly find a connection. At Assembly, aside from everybody talking Finnish, I often stood outside alone in the smoking cage, staring at some of the obscenely breasted promotion girls and went off again without talking to anyone - in case there was nobody available with the pink vip-bracelet. Maybe I'm too shy or too arrogant to talk to the gamers. Then again, I just don't feel like having a "usual" conversation when I'm in the mood of demopartying.

Boozembly

So... where to go? We located Sir Garbagetruck at the so called "scene booth", an area on the exposition and food ring around the hall, where the sceners were supposed to gather and where gamers could get information about the scene. They also had a screen there showing oldschool demos and everybody who wanted to become a jury member of one or another competition could sign up there. Truck told us that somewhere "the boozing will take place" but he didn't know it yet and was kind of busy. I also met Steeler who had travelled from Kindergarten to Assembly and was planning to go to Evoke the week after, but he didn't know anything about the boozing either. So in the late afternoon, Curt Cool, Olli, Browallia, Pumba, some Finnish goth girl the latter one managed to attract, and me, went outside to have a look around the hall. As the Boozembly location of the former years had been destroyed, the boozing this time took place on the other side of the hall. We had to cross a bridge, climb over a fence, up a little hill, through another, damaged, fence and a bit more up, to reach the place of demoscenish freedom - and boy, it reminded me a bit of Breakpoint 2004, my first demoscene party, which was up on a remote hill where nobody would care.

On the first evening, there was not much going on up that hill. However, we met some really nice Finnish people with gamer tickets



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who gave us lots of meat and beer. Later that night, we went downtown where Olli showed us some pubs and bars that he knew from his Erasmus stay. When I went outside to have a smoke, one of those Finnish guys showed up again, trying to explain the demoscene to a very uninterested girl who just thought that all of the people going to Assembly are just plain jerks. I was trying to explain it with my classical metaphor of a (real time) theatre play compared to a (prerendered) movie. The guy was translating it to Finnish after she had stopped understanding me. I gave up and didn't see either of them again. Later, in a different bar, we almost witnessed a fight between two drunken Finnish females - one of them very ugly, the other one quite pretty, but both of them pissed as hell. It was a strange evening, but still fun. Helsinki, however, will stay in my mind with a unique mood. It totally differs from other Scandinavian cities I have been to, be it Copenhagen or Stockholm. It has a touch of socialist Eastern Europe, which probably arises from those 50's official buildings and the overall typical postwar architecture. People also seem to be more melancholic, and when I compare the Karaoke on the ferry, I have to say that, while the Swedish schlager was swinging and happy, the Finnish tango always sounded like someone was crying about an old love that long time ago has passed away... Nevertheless, all the Finnish people I talked to were nice and friendly. Maybe it's just a "deeper" kind of folk or something, which might be promoting some sort of melancholy sometimes.

Back at Assembly the next day, after some sightseeing and hanging out at the beach, watching some barely clothed chicks playing volleyball, the compos started. What I liked about the music compos was the fact that the jury tried to play as many different styles as possible - unlike at the typical demoscene party where Drum'n'Bass and Techno seem to be the universal remedy. Then again, the quality was not really convincing and, in my opinion, inferior compared to Breakpoint. The fact that Curt Cool's mod-file wasn't played, made us go straight outside to the boozing hill!

More Boozembly

Which had been crowded by now! A lot of people, say, 400, were sitting and standing all over the place, boozing, eating, smoking, listening to music, talking about the demoscene and throwing up. This was the place I wanted to go, this was my Mekka. 1500 Kilometers to drink Salmiakki (and Curt's damned "Gamle Dansk") on top of some hill nearby the railroad tracks. It was worth every single mile of the trip.

From time to time, security staff showed up to make sure nobody is dying and, after a while, they guarded the entrance to the boozing hill in order to confiscate any alcohol that was brought along. Party-poopers!

Inside, the main compos were about to start. I don't want to bore you with details about the productions - you can read the comments on pouet and download everything right away from scene.org. All I have to say is, I have never attended a party with that many high quality productions. And the demo competition was, by far, the best I have ever seen. Short enough, with the creme de la creme of the demoscene. The only downer was the non-appearance of TBL with an Amiga demo. Their victory at last year's Assembly and their non-providing of a demo this year at Breakpoint had been an additional (not deciding, though) reason for me to go to Helsinki. Aside from some mod-files, there were no Amiga releases this year - a pity, but that's the times, I guess. Fair enough - an entry for the NES,



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which had basically been my first electronic timekiller in my childhood, won the oldschool competition.

Sleeping Zones

Going to bed during the Assembly party was not as easy as at the normal parties, because the organisers wouldn't allow you to sleep under your table. You may, however, sit and sleep on your chair, while your head has to be seeable all the time. Must be for some security reasons so that they find anybody in case of an emergency. In the sleeping area then, which was on the upper floor of the ringway around the hall, you were not allowed to sleep anywhere either, but only inside the zones marked with barrier tape. Bad luck if you were partying too long at Boozembly, as the kids would have taken over all the available space. So one night I went around the ring with my air mattress and sleeping bag several times, until I decided to give a damn about the sleeping zones and just placed my stuff next to one of those zones, praying to god that the friendly Finnish securities wouldn't wake me up in the middle of the night in order to make me wander around until someone leaves his parking lot. A couple of hours later, I awoke for some reason, and to my pure enjoyment, a barrier tape had been drawn right around the space I was occupying! Smilingly, I fell back asleep. I guess this zoning policy was just to satisfy the authorities, in case somebody was checking to see if everything was executed orderly.

Tripping Home

The pricegiving ceremony revealed ASD and Loonies as the winners of the demo and the 4k compo. At that time however, we had already packed our stuff and went downtown Helsinki to have lunch - and to say goodbye to Browallia who took a flight back home in order to be ready for work on Monday.

Reduced to four, we decided to take a cabin on our ferry back. A necessary decision, as we intended to drive all the way back to Hamburg on Monday and thus badly needed some sleep. "They are four men in a cabin for two, with a porn channel but no privacy. How do they manage?" Well, after some Amiga demowatching on a laptop, hanging out in the ship's discotheque and the now already well known and thus not anymore interesting karaoke bar, we just went to sleep, knackered after a week of travelling and partying. Being the drivers, Olli and I took the beds while Pumba and Curt Cool happily accomodated their mattresses on the limited space on the floor of that tiny room. Still, much more comfortable than lying around on the ship somewhere - and the cabin even had a built-in shower.

Saying good bye to Pumbaa after an amazingly short journey back to Stockholm, us three fetched my untowed car from Brow's place and, after lunch in a real Swedish Ikea store, we went back through Schweden to Copenhagen.

Vi ses - See you



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A sad feeling overcame me when we said "vi ses" to Curt Cool. Four contries in a week driven through, hundreds of people talked to, a lot of booze drunk and little sleep got, Olli and me, sitting with take-away Pizzas on a bench in Valby (Copenhagen), we were about to end this extraordinary road trip. Another 400 kilometers later, including two big bridges in Denmark and philosophizing about ex-girlfriends and the reaction delay on a German Autobahn at 140 kmph at night, Olli and me arrived in good health back in Hamburg at around midnight.

Will I go to Assembly again? Most probably not. It was a great experience and in summer - my last summer break from university - I was in the need for a change. Now or never, I thought, and I was lucky having friends who wanted to share the experience with me and who were fun to be with all the time. Assembly itself was not at all comparable to my regular Breakpoint journey. Breakpoint, held during easter, is the party where the new year starts for me. Aside from the costs to go to Assembly (all in all something like 450 Euros), Evoke in Cologne is the place where I meet more demoscene friends and where I feel more comfortable. Still, I can clearly recommand every scener to go to Assembly once. It's an experience you won't forget - and a living legend where, in a commercial environment, the demoscene spirit is definitely cherished.

Selectanovel of Moods Plateau