



ASSEMBLY'2004 PARTY REPORT

by Milan Kolarovic

From the 5th to the 8th of August, it was here once again for the 13th time. It was already my 6th time, and each year I get that "I'm too old for this" feeling stronger and stronger. I know I've grown older, that's a fact, but the nature of the event has changed over the years as well. The competitions however haven't changed all that much in the recent years, mainly just fine-tuning of smaller things here and there. One of the biggest upgrades to the competitions this year was perhaps the combining of wild demo and animation competitions. This proved to be a wise decision as the amount of entries in several other compos as well kept on decreasing dangerously low. More of that later on. The world's biggest demo-scene event was here again. This article views the event and competitions from my perspective and of those areas which I'm most interested in.



Milan Kolarovic (a.k.a. Acumen)

My own contribution to this year's event was minimal. Due to the lack of time and other things, my contribution this year was restricted to two pieces, one freestyle graphics competition work and one short film competition entry, the latter being actually a work-for-hire but which ended up at Assembly half by accident. Nevertheless, against all my expectations the event turned out to be quite a success again, even though this year served mostly as an "interval". I have to say that I personally enjoyed the end of July and beginning of August much more now that I wasn't having (too many) of sleepless nights, although that's all just temporary as I'm getting ready for 2005 or 2006 with 'Project Focus' (working title). I'm probably up for one more sabbatical year (2005), but not inevitably, as new songs and ideas are already flying around.

Four sleepless days and three nights at the Hartwall Arena had lured again approx. 5000 full-weekend party visitors from all parts of Finland as well from abroad. The total number of visitors is presumably around 6000 to 7000, as there's an increasing number of single day visitors at the event. I had brought my own digicamera, a Sony Mavica CD500, to the event. The four day sum was over 1GB worth of photos and video clips. However such point & shoot cameras aren't at their best in such low light situations at an event like this where you should boost up the ISOs to get acceptable shutter speeds, but then the small CCD/CMOS-chip would generate too much noise. Next year I'll have better photographs to contribute as I'm soon upgrading to Canon dSLR equipment. Enough of chitchat, let's take a look at what the Assembly brought for all of us this year.

"The demo-scene is a subculture in the computer underground culture universe, dealing with the creative and constructive side of technology, proving that a computer can be used for much more than writing a letter in MS-Word and hence emphasizing on computer technology as just another medium that can transport ideas and styles, show off skills and express opinions etc. Another theory says that it's just a bunch of boozing computer nerds, programming weird, useless multimedia stuff."

~ PC Demoscene FAQ,
by Thomas Gruetzmacher

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The oldskool area had moved back to the ground floor level of the arena where it resided previously in 2001. A truly positive step as the "cellar" where the game heaven now laid had been a terrible heat trap and still was. I had my green VIP ticket on my wrist again this year, plus a nice door-to-door ride to and from the party to my home in a nice Volvo – things were ready to go.



A nice panorama view of the oldskool area on day one.

COMPETITIONS IN GENERAL

The number of different competitions has stayed approximately the same from year to year. Only a few cosmetic changes have been made here and there. The animation competition and the wild demo competition had been combined into one single competition named "short film competition", which was a wise call due to the low amount of entries each year. In my last year's report I wrote about "how the rules and founding ideas of some competitions (e.g. vocal music compo) should perhaps be better defined in order to avoid unintended mix-ups" and by the looks of it my feedback got registered. The vocal competition's name was changed in to "freestyle music competition", but the rules as well as the idea behind the competition had stayed the same. In theory this change allowed more moving space for interpreting the rules, but in practice everything had stayed the same.

MUSIC COMPETITIONS



In the music jury room.

The number of entries in both freestyle and vocal music competitions was at perhaps its all time lowest, which raises concern for the years to follow. I've written about the diminishing factor in both the amount and quality of entries in prior years, and the direction is unfortunately still the same. In last year's report I wrote that the number of entries hadn't at that point in time reached a "panic button" -stage, this year I'd say it has.



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I wouldn't be surprised at all if these two main music competitions would be combined as one big all-around music competition. In my opinion, it would be the best thing to do if the number of entries keeps moving in this direction. By joining in the music competitions as one big mp3 music competition, we would get both more quality, more entries and logically also twice as large a prize for the compo which would help motivate people even further.

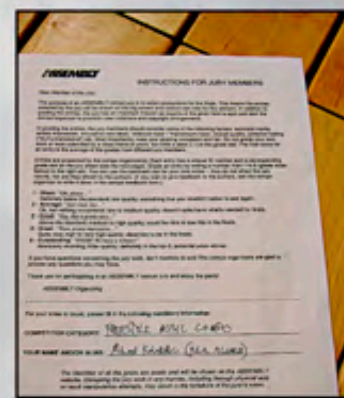
I participated in both the vocal and instrumental music juries, for the 5th time since Assembly'2000. For the first time in my own Assembly history I didn't have a song of my own in any of the music competitions.



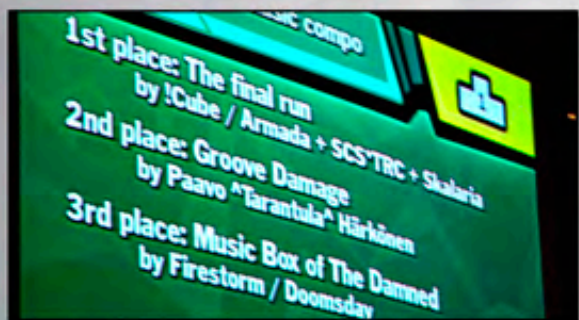
Two members of the music juries.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC COMPETITION

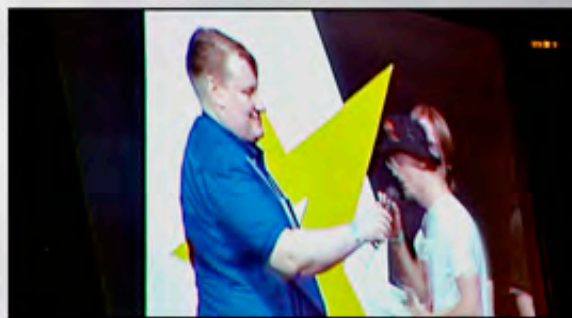
Orchestral, movie-soundtrack types of songs ruled this year, again. Only 55 entries were submitted to the competition, out of which 11 were accepted to the screen. Names like Jugi, Jean Nine, Ari 'artz' Pulkkinen and Quasian were left out of the final. The competition's victory went to !Cube with an orchestral song called 'The final run'. Firestorm of Doomsday placed 3rd with a song entitled as "Music Box of The Damned", an orchestral song which resembled a lot of Danny Elfman's work. I had a talk with Firestorm a day before the party and on that basis the 3rd place must have satisfied him perfectly as his main project for this year was going to be something else. More on that later on. Overall the quality of the compo could have been better. It was certainly not as good as I would have thought and hoped it would be.



Music jury member's voting sheet.



The competition's results on the big screen.



!Cube collection his reward and greeting the audience.

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FREESTYLE MUSIC COMPETITION

There were only 32 entries, out of which nine were selected to the final. Do the math; almost 30% of entries were qualified. The winner of the competition was clear to me as well as to most of the jury members even before we had heard all the songs. 'Vår dag' by Shanona convinced us as well as apparently the rest of party visitors from the very first seconds onwards. Perhaps the most noticeable difference in this particular song compared to others was its mixing and post-processing quality. Some jury member described it as "radio quality", and I agree. I'd describe the song as nice summer-ish in-car material, which I could imagine listening to while driving on some countryside road on a nice sunny summer day. A more earthly description would categorize the song as a typical pop/rock song with a catchy chorus.

'Rakkaus meitä yhdistää' by Harmonian polku was the humor uplift of the competition, for the jury as well (download the video clips from my website). It was, however, done with good taste and it landed in 2nd place. The 3rd place went to Der with a song called 'Vietnam Veteran', a different kind of song with a clearly thought out and well organized planning. Although I'm not a fan of guitar based rock-ish music, my respect to those who play their own instruments (and even sing). Worth the mention would also be PK's 'Powerless' (5th), even though the Prodigy (Firestarter) influences were a tad too obvious.



A panorama view of the arena before the lights were switched off.



..and after the lights were switched off.

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Dixan's 'Dolphin 2 – Dolphin's escape' had probably the best atmosphere when it comes to the use of different sounds and freshness. The jury, however, felt that it lacked the content, and perhaps so did the audience as it finished 6th. The prize for the most surprising entry would have to go to Tanja & Vesa, where Vesa equals Vesa Norilo – also known as Warder. His song 'Unlike Me' was definitely the best produced, mixed and mastered track out of the whole bunch. However this trip-hop-ish song clearly lacked the "mainstream content" and perhaps due to that reason only 7th place was achievable for this scene legend. Vesa didn't attend the party personally.

In general this compo left me with mixed feelings. A few really good songs, but even they can't compensate for the loss in the number of entries and for the "standard quality" entries. The gap between the good and the "not-so-good" entries had continued to grow.

THE FAST MUSIC COMPETITION

This was an 8-song-final, which was once again won by Ari 'artz' Pulkkinen with a song called 'Summer Rain'. This might have been the 3rd or 4th time in a row Ari has won this competition; he surely could use some challenge. In his victory speech he made a remark about the low value of the prizes given. He had received an MP3 player (Creative's model) which he could re-sell for about \$150 when at the same time the announced value of the particular prize was \$300. After talking with him, we came to the conclusion that perhaps the value of all the prizes were been reduced because of some damage or excessive littering done at the arena (it's stated that it can happen under the general competitions rules at www.assembly.org).



Ari Pulkkinen at the prize ceremony stand.

All in all, this was a tight competition which could benefit from a few more contestants and perhaps a slightly longer time allowed for the music making process. I've always been very tempted to participate in this competition, but due to lack of hardware possibilities on-site I've never participated - but for next year I'm really looking into the possibility of joining in.



THE OLDSKOOL MUSIC COMPETITION

Skalaria's 'Da Smit Eastwood Jacks' won the competition with a clear margin in points. Britelite's 4th place finish from last year was now improved by two places as his song called 'Last Try' came 2nd. Last year's winner, Reed, had to satisfy himself with 6th place with a song called "The Dragon Returns". A very healthy number of entries was submitted to the competition, 49 of them.

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FREESTYLE THEMED GRAPHICS COMPETITION

For the first time in my own Assembly history, I participated in a competition that had absolutely nothing to do with music. Like I stated in last year's report, I'm very intrigued by this rather new competition which allows the use of photographs as part of or even as the whole entry. This competition was going to be the only competition this year I was going to participate with something entirely my own. I wasn't expecting much, after all I'm rather new at graphics, but seeing my first work almost reaching a place in the final warmed my heart. 18 entries were seen in the final, while mine finished 21st in the jury points. There were 36 entries in total submitted to this competition.

'Get Off My Back' by poro won the competition with over a thousand point margin to the second. Well known graphicicians like Visualice had to settle for places outside the podium. Visualice's work called 'Shining Bulb' came 14th in the compo.

On the right you can see my contribution to the compo. This work started accidentally soon after Assembly'2003 and it soon became clear I wanted to try out my wings on this area of self-expression as well. The work is called 'Setting Soul' and it should be self-explanatory. I will certainly enter this competition again next year.



'Setting Soul' by Milan Kolarovic (a.k.a. Acumen)

BROWSER DEMO COMPETITION

6 is the number of entries this competition was able to gather this year. Very appealing to say the least. It doesn't look good, but let's all still hope that the competition will survive for the years to come. This year's victory went to 'Mooncheese' by Shingebis with a rather small margin. Only 500 points behind was 'the Summer is HERE!' by kellari & inapt.

I had some chats with Esko Ahonen during the event and we talked about the possibility of teaming up again for the 2005 competition. It remains to be seen if we both have enough time and ideas on our hands when the time comes. For those who don't know, we placed 3rd in 2002 with a flash demo called 'Evolve' and 2nd in a special Asus flash competition in the same year.



People dozing around at HP's stand and its "bean-bag-chairs".

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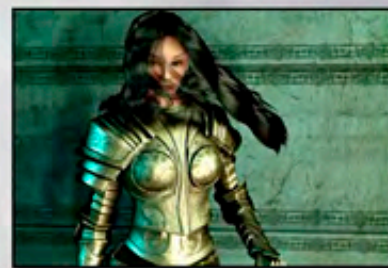
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SHORT FILM COMPETITION

A warmly welcomed renewal to the video competitions had been made. For many years both the animation and the wild demo competition were a bit short in the number of entries they received. This year there was only one competition, the short film competition. Prizes had also been checked, although the change was not as dramatic as you could sum up. With Digita Ltd. sponsoring the competition, the main prize was \$2000. I have very warm memories of both of the now deceased competitions. In 2001 I came 2nd in the wild demo competition with a work called 'World War II memoirs' and in 2002 an animation called 'Project Kerosene' won the animation competition. This brilliant 3D masterpiece by Heikki Anttila carried my song, called 'Kerosene'. But enough of history, let's march onward.

32 entries altogether made up as a decent number, although it's not yet astoundingly high. I had no plan to take part in this competition this year, but as it every so often happens, fate had decided otherwise. More of that fate in a minute.

A humor based video called 'Kanava OMEGA' by Tekotuotanto took the victory with clear points. In my opinion the best work in the competition followed the winner in 2nd place. 'Cursed Forest 4' by Pellid Productions was an extremely well thought-out mini-movie which would have deserved to win. Like I earlier in this report hinted, Firestorm's (a.k.a. Panu Aaltio) main work for this year was going to be something different. He directed and wrote the music for the video. Congratulations on the job well done!



'Demoreel 2004' by F. Dice Studios



Certificate of Honor for 'Demoreel 2004'.

Now back to the fate part. Few weeks prior to the Assembly event, a chain of events took place which resulted in an entry called 'Demoreel 2004' by F. Dice Studios, which I was part of.

I made a boosted-up version of my song called 'Kerosene' for the animation. It was a work made for hire, but it also premiered at the Assembly due to fortunate circumstances and coincidence. Our work reached 3rd place, which was more than satisfying under the circumstances and amongst the tight competition. The podium place was a really tight call, as another fine crafted work called 'Kontula: Underkraund' followed in 4th place only 82 points behind.

'Demoreel 2004' continued its travel a week after the event to its original and primary destination: Los Angeles and an event called SigGraph 2004. SigGraph is an international conference on computer graphics and interactive techniques.

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4K / 64K INTRO COMPETITIONS

The 4k intro is perhaps the most difficult competition there is. 4096 bytes ain't a lot. Squeezing both the code and the music in to that amount is an art-form itself. The 4k compo was quite dramatic as clearly the best looking and sounding intro was disqualified. Push Entertainment, with an intro called 'Rebirth', had "borrowed" the soundtrack from one well-known DJ's song. It's a real pity because the intro dropped eyes. Hard to imagine why on earth the author(s) would have wanted to go with the "easy" way as the rules are very clear on copyright violations. Damn, if the guys at Push Ent. are reading this, if you can't think of anything else - let me do the music next year for ya :)

The official winner of the 4k compo was 'San Angeles Observation' by tonic, !CUBE and st. Rana. Even though 'Rebirth' was beyond all the others, this threesome's intro wasn't bad at all either. The same can be said of 'Feet4' by AND, which came 2nd in the competition. AND had won the 64k intro competition last year with the amazing 'Zoom3' (together with Cybermag).

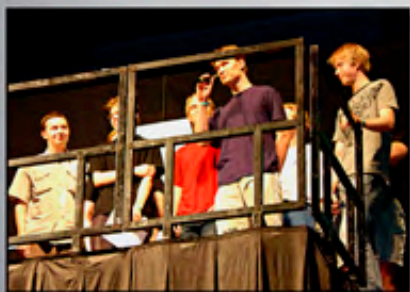
The 64k intro competition had received only 3 valid entries. This doesn't look good at all. Hopefully next year there still will be 4k and 64k competitions held separately. The victory of this year's 64k went to Conspiracy with an intro called 'The Prophecy - Project Nemesis' with a clear point margin of about 7000 points.

GAME DEVELOPMENT COMPETITION



Matti Hämäläinen (a.k.a. WaZaa)

tAAt's era of dominating this competition had come to an end. We saw only 7 entries, but what we missed in quantity we gained in quality. Marelwish's 'B.A.L.L.O.' was an exceptional example of a unique idea matured to completion. They surely deserved their victory. I know their main graphician, Matti Hämäläinen, quite well. He and his team were part of the same group of people we hang out with at the event. They are working on a new version of the game at the time of the writing of this article. New coders as well graphicians and musicians are wanted. More info at <http://marelwish.uname.info>.



Marelwish's team receiving the 1st prize.

Aukiogames followed 2nd with almost a 5000 point gap with 'TSS Demo'. An upcoming big game-release from Finland, 'StarFight: Comrades', followed at 3rd. JP-Production's newest arrival to the StarFight series looked and sounded very good. My friend Ari 'artz' Pulkkinen is in charge of the game's music. This is the same guy who's dominating the fast music compos. tAAt was left with 4th place. 'Dismount Levels' offered only a few new ideas to the dismount series, and the old joke clearly didn't appeal to the audience any more.

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DEMO COMPETITION

The crème de la crème, the combined demo competition, has always been the most anticipated moment of every party event. Last year's \$5000 prize amount had been reduced to \$4000, but otherwise everything had stayed unchanged.

'Obsoleet' by Unreal Voodoo won the competition with over a thousand-point margin to the follow-up. 'Planet Risk' by Andromeda Software Development came 2nd. My personal favorite was 'We Cell' by Kewlers, which carried by far the best soundtrack amongst all the demos, perhaps the best piece of music in the whole event. The soundtrack is titled 'The Jupiter Sound (Reefer Evil remix)' and it's made by AK Balance & Little Bitchard. Kewlers finished in 5th place in the competition and received a worthwhile \$500 prize.

I hate to say this, but I was a little disappointed in the overall output of the demos. Everything looked marvelous and sounded loud, but nothing really shook the insides of me in any way.

"A demo(nstration) in a demoscene sense, is a piece of free software that shows realtime rendered graphics, while playing music. Often, the music is tightly connected/synced to the visuals. Modern pc demos run in a linear fashion from start to finish and are non-interactive. There are no rules whatsoever about what a demo must or can show."

~ PC Demoscene FAQ,
by Thomas Gruetzmacher

The competition was candy for the eyes, but not for the soul... either that, or then I'm just too oldskool-ish to understand the beauty of modern demos.

HIGHLIGHTS & THUMB UP'N DOWNS

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + The official results v1.00
No disqualifications after the event, the results v1.00 have stayed final + Organizing
Deserves a thumbs up as always + Assembly'2004 poster
Free of charge, like last year + Kewler's 'We Cell' demo
The combination of that 'ink in water' effect and the music that rolls on was to my liking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compo prizes
Decrease in both compo prizes compared to the year before, as well some oddity in the published prize values vs. real value - Compo entries quality
The minor decrease in the overall quality of the competition entries seems to continue, in addition to the now seen alarming low number of entries in some competitions |
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SUMMARY

The 13th event went well in my opinion, and gathering from what I heard little birds talking, in other's opinions as well. Sure, there are always little glitches, but we were saved from the big ones, as so often before. I personally had a nice time at Assembly'2004. Once again I met many interesting people, participated in the competitions and experienced the jury process from within. I'd like to say thanks and send greetings to all the people who came to talk with me and whom I had the pleasure of meeting! My only regret is not having enough time to attend any of the seminars and other side-activities. Music jury duties consume a significant amount of "quality" time; the rest is more or less just dozing around. I guess I'm really getting too old for this, or too much of a comfort-seeker to enjoy staying up for days with the same pair of eyes... but I can't rest yet, too much ambition and ideas are incubating. I hope to finish my long time project, 'Project Focus' (working title), either in 2005 or 2006. More of that on my website.

The event is going through some kind of a slow metamorphosis. The event's main plot is slowly turning from the demo-scene towards the gaming-scene. I'm also sensing an interesting time for the whole demo-scene, at least in the Finnish demo-scene, as there's a more obvious generation gap forming. The old ones are slowly "retiring", but is there a new generation to take their place? Perhaps the demo-scene is closing in on some sort of a "mid-life crisis".

Summarized, I'd give Assembly'2004 an overall thumbs up and ***+ / *****

See you all next year at Assembly'2005!

Milan Kolarovic

"Demo-scene parties are festivals where sceners meet. Usually, there is a big screen, compos you can participate in and lots of weird people from all over the world you can meet and talk to, exchange ideas and booze with. There is a network too (but not for gaming)."

~ PC Demoscene FAQ,
by Thomas Gruetzmacher

Check out www.milankolarovic.com for video clips from the event as well for reports from previous years.

Thanks to Jacqueline Kivimäki for checking this article for spelling and grammar.

See the next pages for photographs from the event..

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PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE EVENT ^{1/2}



It's me playing Bugbear's latest game called Flatout.



Me again, carrying the prizes 'Demoreel 2004' won.



The better looking gender was also nicely presented at the party...



Ei mene sormi ainakaan suuhun
kun Asuksen äijä laittaa konettasi kuntoon...



Sonera's marketing girls were dressed up for the occasion...

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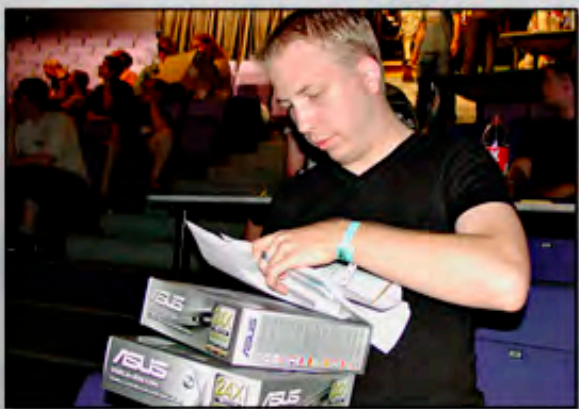


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The end

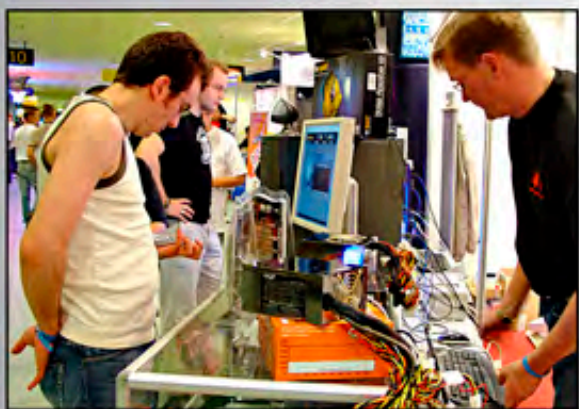
PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE EVENT ^{2/2}



Me again, carrying the prizes that 'Demoreel 2004' had won.



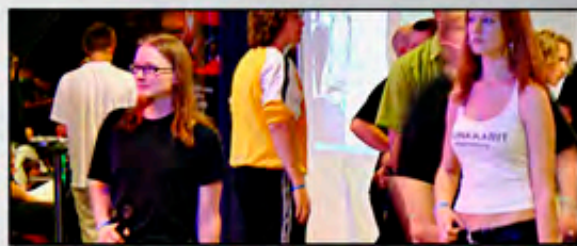
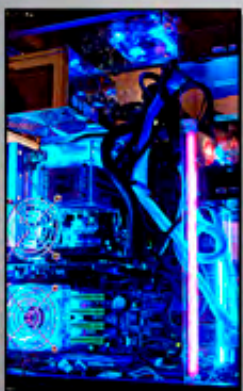
It's nice to come home with a bag full of prizes.



Akiba's stands offered all kinds of goods for the nerdier gender to fondle...



Ei mene sormi suuhun myöskään
Assembly organisaation infodeskillä...



A girl and a shirt saying "wankers"...

The end

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