TechTips Newsletter

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The Invisibility Cloak

Reading and watching Harry Potter, we have all envied the power of the invisibility cloak at one time or another. Remember the meeting you would have loved to sneak into? What about the time you wanted to sneak into the teachers lounge to find out all the test answers? Turns out, researchers are one step closer to having these powers.

Until now, the problems with cloaking devices has been that they only really work if both the viewer and whatever is being cloaked remain still, which is not exactly practical. Now, for the first time, researches have made a cloaking device that works multi-directionally in three dimensions.

Sounds like it takes massive amounts of high tech equipment? This cloaking device uses nothing but four standard lenses.

"There've been many high tech approaches to cloaking and the basic idea behind these is to take light and have it pass around something as if it isn't there, often using high-tech or exotic materials," says professor of physics at Rochester university, John Howell, who developed the Rochester Cloak with graduate student, Joseph Choi.

As well as at least partially solving the viewpoint problem, the Rochester cloak also leaves the background undisturbed, without any warping, as has appeared in other devices.

Geeky Pumpkins!

As a tradition, we carve pumpkins on Halloween to scare away spirits and ghosts. Some of us like to change things up by carving geeky pumpkins.

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Do you have experience with Technology by Design that you'd think other people would want to hear? How would you like to have lunch or dinner, on us?

Ask us how you can have your business promoted though us, and get your dinner too!

Want some more information? Call us at 204-800-3166, or email helpdesk@tbyd.ca!

WANT TO BUILD YOUR OWN SOFT ROBOT?

Harvard University in collaboration with Trinity College in Dublin have launched a soft robotics toolkit that contains all the information for enthusiasts to build their own robot.

You can't purchase the parts on the website, but it contains information about all the different parts you could use, and the information you need before you shop around for parts.

The toolkit also includes downloadable, open-source plans, how-to videos, case studies, raw experimental data, sample code for controlling robotic systems, and a way to communicate with others building soft robots. This allowed communication would provide a way to share tips, fabrication techniques, and more so that designers from around the world can learn from each other and build on each other's work.

"One thing we've seen in design courses is that students greatly benefit from access to more experienced peers -- say, postdocs in a research lab -- who can guide them through their work," said Trinity College's Dónal Holland, currently a visiting lecturer at the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. "But scaling that up is difficult; you quickly run out of time and people. The toolkit is designed to capture the expertise and make it easily accessible to students."

Want more information on how to make your own soft robot? See the toolkit at: http://softroboticstoolkit.com.

HOW TO TRAVEL- FROM YOUR COUCH

We all know half the fun of travel is bragging about the things you are doing on Facebook.

25 year old Zilla van den Born wanted the bragging rights, without leaving her couch. Using her photoshop skills, she tricked all of her friends and family into thinking she had been travelling through Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia for over a month.

Zilla would Skype her family "back home" quite a bit, and post lots of photos. She sampled lots of Asian cuisine, visited a Buddhist temple, went snorkelling, and met some new friends. Or so it seemed to her friends and family.

In reality Zilla redecorated her apartment several times to fit the description of a hotel room of whatever country she was pretending to be in, so she could Skype her family and take photos "from the hotel". She either ordered in, or made her own Asian cuisine. She did actually go to a Buddhist temple,

but it just happened to be the only Buddhist temple in Amsterdam. The snorkelling and friends? All a product of creative Photoshop. For example, the photo of her snorkelling was actually taken in her apartment pool, but altered to make it look like she was in the ocean with tropical fish.

The Dutch woman wanted to show exactly how easy it can be for people to create a fake online identity, and that Facebook statuses and photos aren't always the most accurate portrayal of someone's life.

"I did this to show people that we filter and manipulate what we show on social media. Thereby we create an online ideal world which reality can no longer meet. My goal was to prove how common and easy it is to distort reality," she said of the project.

Although her family was originally mad that they were tricked, she said her family has forgiven her, and is now laughing at how clever it was.

INVISIBLE ART?

May people have read the story floating around Facebook and Twitter about how Lana Newstrom is creating "invisible art". But there might be more to the story than you can imagine.

The story we are talking about is about 27 year old artist, Lana Newstrom, who has claimed that she is the first artist in the world to create invisible "art".

"Art is about imagination and that is what my work demands of the people interacting with it. You have to imagine a painting or sculpture is in front of you," says Newstrom. She also said "Just because you can't see anything, doesn't mean that I didn't put hours of work into creating a particular piece".

The story went viral, without people reading the full story, or listening to the audio portion of the website, which it now seems was an important part of the story.

As it turns out, the story was reported by CBC's "That is That" program, which is hosted by Pat Kelly and Peter Oldring, both of whom are comedians.

Pat Kelly claimed that the idea stemmed from the idea of interpretation, saying "in the arts, there is much room for interpretation and we thought it would be interesting to push the idea to the extreme ... the invisible art."

He continued to say that "people read on the Internet so quickly that many did not taken the time to check if it was true or not. We encourage people to listen to the audio, because that is where lies the joke. After listening, people will have a hard time believing it's true."

GEEK CHIC COUTURE

With the big comic conventions only coming once a year, nerds had to find another outlet for their sewing abilities, which lead to a one-of-a-kind runway show at San Diego Comic-Con.

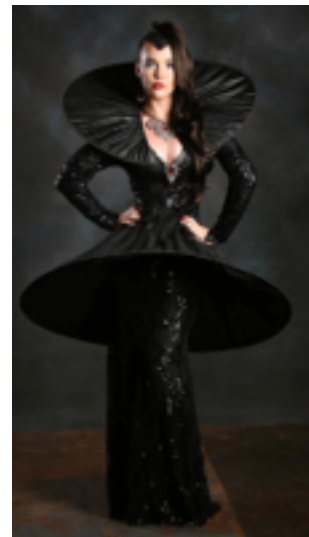Hosted by "Her Universe", 36 nerdy costume designers competed to work with Her Universe clothing and have some designs launched and available at Hot Topic stores in the US. Only 2 winners would be chosen- one by the audience, and one by the judges.

Dresses had to be pop-culture inspired, which lead to inspiration from Pokemon, The Hunger Games, Back To The Future, The Hobbit, Doctor Who, Star Wars, and more.

The judges' winner was Amy Beth Christenson for her "Back to the Future"-inspired ensemble called "Great Skirt, Marty." The audience winner was "Once Upon a Time"-inspired gown "Regina's Curse" by Andrew MacLaine.

You may have missed your chance to enter this year, but founder of Her Universe clothing, Ashley Eckstein said there will be more to come.

"In developing the Her Universe fashion show, it was always our goal to make this an annual show," Eckstein said. "Geek-inspired fashion is not a trend, it's a fashion category that's here to stay. We look forward to many more geek couture fashion shows for years to come."

TechTip Postcard

Insider Tips and Secrets to Get The MOST Out of Your Computer   **OCT 2014**

Does The Thoughts Of Your In-House Computer Expert Leaving Scare You To Death?

Here's an scary question most businesses don't think about: what would happen if your computer guy suddenly quit? Most business owners think it would only be a temporary inconvenience when, in fact, the opposite is usually true. Want to know how much you are at risk? Ask yourself the following 6 frightening questions:

1. Do you have written network documentation about your computer network? What software licenses do you own? What are the critical administrator passwords to your systems and devices? How is your computer network structured? What hardware do you own and when do your equipment warranties expire? Are there cloud vendors for email, online storage, hosted line of business applications, etc. that you don't currently have? You should NEVER allow a single IT person or company keep this information under their full control over your network and company. If they suddenly left for any reason, this could lead to huge consequences for your company.

2. Do you know where your backup files are stored and if they are being stored properly? If you are like most business owners, you're too busy dealing with the "crisis of the day" to think about system backups and probably leave tasks to your internal expert. If your database gets fried and your tech is nowhere to be found, you might be in a lot of trouble.

3. Do you have a written plan for restoring your network fast in the case of a disaster? If you don't have a fully tested disaster recovery plan for your office, you could be at serious risk without ever knowing it until something happens.

4. Do you know where all of your software is stored? Bad things can happen to computers and servers, and the situation can be made worse if you are not prepared. Taking a minute to organize and store your software in a secure place can save you a considerable chunk of money in the event that you need to restore a program on your systems. If you don't have access to the software or don't know where it is located, you might be forced to buy the software again.

5. Do you know what routine maintenance is being done on your network? I know that the very idea of learning about and keeping track of all the servers, workstations and peripherals on your network is about as welcome as a black cat crossing your path, but it is important information to maintain. If your in-house expert leaves, who will take over?

6. Do you know how to protect yourself from an ugly security breach if your in-house computer expert leaves? What happens if your in-house expert splits with no warning AND has access to your company's network? As soon as humanly possible, you should disable his or her access, including remote access to your network and all cloud-based applications.

So how did you do? If you answered "no" to even one of these questions, you need to get the answers now before it's too late.