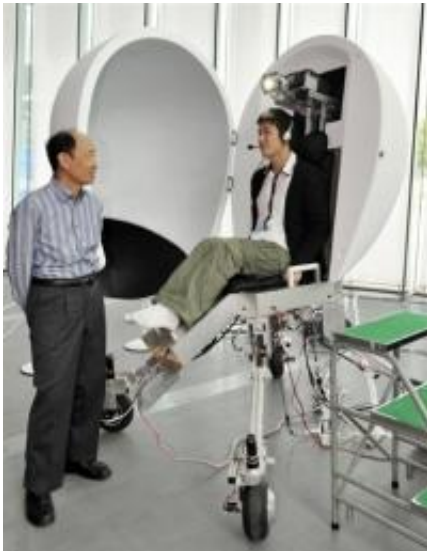


Bad breath fights monsters at Japan whacky tech fair

22 October 2009, by Miwa Suzuki



A professor at Japan's Tsukuba University, presents his virtual reality machine "Media Vehicle" at the Digital Contents Expo in Tokyo. A monster-slaying bad breath blow gun and a rain-simulating "funbrella" are two of the bizarre gadgets that went on display at the Digital Content Expo, a fair showcasing futuristic gaming, arts, medical and other technologies.

A monster-slaying bad breath blow gun, a rain-simulating "funbrella" and a navigation-aid helmet that steers users by pulling their ears: welcome to Japan's latest whacky inventions.

These bizarre [gadgets](#) and more -- some of them useful, most of them fun -- went on display at the Digital Content Expo, a fair showcasing futuristic gaming, arts, medical and other technologies that opened Thursday.

A clear crowd-pleaser at the four-day event was a blowgun videogame by the Kanazawa Institute of Technology where the enemies are a scary lineup of monsters including a vampire, a bat and a club-wielding ogre.

Rather than fire bullets, darts or lasers at the fearsome adversaries, players of all ages eat snacks and sip drinks to boost the smell of their breath, then blast stinky [bad breath](#) balls at the screen to kill the monsters.

"Your children may shun you when you come home reeking of alcohol, but this could make you a family hero," said Yusuke Sasayama, a Kanazawa Institute engineering student and one of the brains behind the game.

Osaka University graduate students, meanwhile, wowed audiences with their "Funbrella" -- the perfect gift for people who hate sunny days -- which uses a technology the inventors called the "tele-rain" system.

A vibrating device on the gadget simulates the sensation of raindrops hitting the umbrella, and there are advanced settings for hails of marbles, snakes and other objects that don't usually fall from the sky.

"With this 'Funbrella' you could feel an Amazon downpour in the desert," said Yoshifumi Kitamura, associate professor at the university.

He also suggested it could help lovers who are separated by vast distances to share the feeling of braving a rainstorm together as they talk by telephone.

For those with little sense of direction, Yuichiro Kojima, a researcher at the University of Electro-Communications, has come up with an alternative to GPS and navigation systems or the humble compass and map.

His head-mounted device steers users by gently pulling their ears.

One team member said it was inspired by "parents towing their children and pulling their ears, which

allows you to lead people with gentle force."

In one of the breakthroughs at the show, electronic powerhouse Sony Corp. showed off a world-first device -- a cylindrical three-dimensional display where the image can be viewed from any angle.

"It is unprecedented that you can see a 3D image from 360 degrees and in full colour," Sony spokeswoman Saori Takahashi said of the device, about the size of a coffee machine.

"This could be used for education or as a 3D photo frame in the future," she said. "If we can adapt this for motion pictures, it would lead to a 3D video-phone or to virtual pets."

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APA citation: Bad breath fights monsters at Japan whacky tech fair (2009, October 22) retrieved 20 May 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-10-bad-monsters-japan-whacky-tech.html>

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