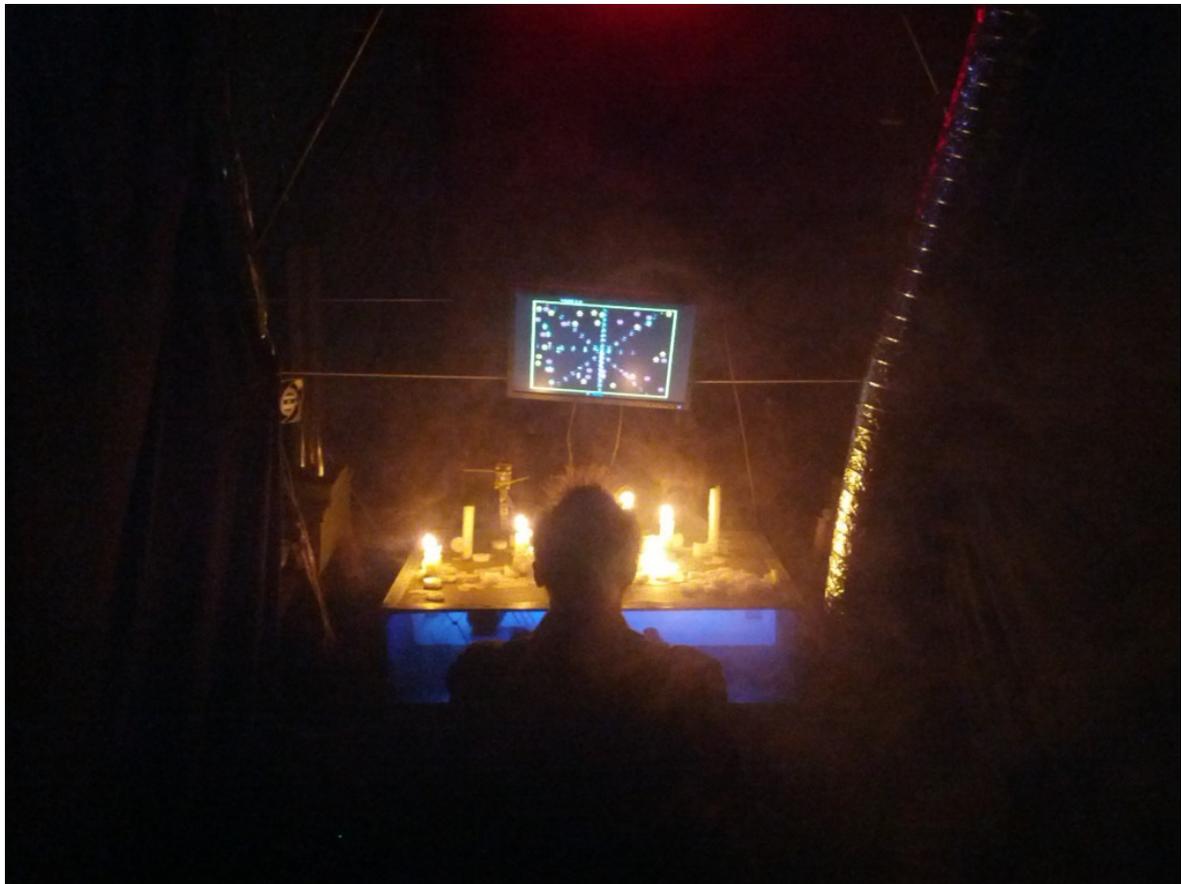# ToorCamp Journal, Day 2: The altar of geekdom

August 11, 2012 at 11:32 am by Amal Graafstra   0 Comments

Share this: Like   2   0

The "altar" at the Church of Robotron at ToorCamp on the Washington Coast.

[Editor's Note: Amal Graafstra is one of hundreds of people attending ToorCamp, a summer camp for geeks now under way on the Washington coast. The author of the book RFID Toys and a "double RFID implantee," Graafstra won a ticket to the event through a GeekWire contest. He's sending dispatches from the camp to give the rest of us a sense for life there. Also see his introductory post and Day 1.]

Today didn't start out the way it was supposed to, but I guess it's inevitable that every camper forgets at least one thing. Well, I forgot to pack the pet injectors necessary to implant RFID tags at the Implantation Station. Luckily, a "quick" (hour long) drive to "nearby" Forks resulted in a small miracle. After a short conversation about how ridiculous vampires are, a local animal hospital was willing to sell me a number of pet injectors! I returned triumphantly and rescheduled the Implantation Station activity for tomorrow morning.

That left my morning open to listen in on George Dyson, son of famed physicist Freeman Dyson, and his talk about Project Orion … an attempt in the '50s to build an atomic bomb powered spacecraft. Yes, you read that right; A spaceship that quickly ejected small atomic bombs into a blast zone directly under the ship, generating a massive atomic explosion 2-3 times per second, propelling the spacecraft upward. What's most fascinating about the talk is a video shot in the '50s that showed a small working proof of concept model powered by exploding balls of C4. The ship pulsed up into the air, higher and higher with each blast. The entire story details just how serious the US government was about the project, and how protective they are of the scientific research even to this day. George wrote a book about Project Orion and gave a great 10 minute TED talk about it too… both are definitely worth checking out.

After the talk, I helped myself to some of the free on tap "Shadow Mate" soda, which was a sweet carbonated concoction based on a Yerba Mate tea derivative. Talking to Hex the brewmaster, he had a fascinating open source approach to his tea recipe. He put the tea recipe up on GitHub, a popular collaborative environment for open source software code. The idea was that if someone tried tweaking the recipe and wound up with something they felt was better, they should fork the project and update the recipe in that fork with their changes. The recipe can grow and evolve on GitHub in an organic and manageable way, and people can try different blends and subscribe to different forks and branches they like better to contribute or simply watch as it evolves.

Shadow Mate soda recipe: Click for larger version.

All around me, things were buzzing and people were really getting into their chosen activities. Welders were teaching people to weld, people were learning how to etch their own PCBs, 3D printers were busy slinging hot ABS plastic, and the solder guns – as always – were at the ready. I attended talks on asset recovery methods including EXIF data photo processing, license plate detection systems, facial recognition systems, protein folding initiatives and why they matter (it's science, it always matters), and did an interview about RFID with Darren from Hak5.

The day wrapped with a quick visit to the Church of Robotron, and a nice sit around the warm bonfire for smores and fireside chats… only these chats were all about penetration testing and Android hacking. There are a lot of strange characters here at ToorCamp, but they mostly come out at night. It's not uncommon to pass by Boba Fett

or see a pink Sasquatch on your way to your tent. Hopefully tomorrow's implantation station event goes off without anymore hitches. One hitch was enough.

Follow Amal

Graafstra on Twitter *@amal* and *find out more on his site*. **For more on ToorCamp**, listen to our recent GeekWire podcast interview with David Hulton, one of the organizers of the event.