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## ARCHIVE

## TOMB raiders: Interactive game takes you on a sensory adventure

By JODY FEINBERG  
*The Patriot Ledger*

Boston University students Richard Shideler and A.J. Rich watched people grin and joke as they emerged from the interactive adventure show "Tomb." When it was their turn, the two were psyched.

"We've heard so much applause (from inside) that we want a piece of the action," said Richard Shideler, 21, a senior at Boston University's School of Communication.

"Tomb," which opened earlier this month near Fenway Park, is unlike any other entertainment in New England, a hybrid that combines elements of a haunted house, theme park exhibit and video game. At its most basic level, it's a fabulously detailed theatrical set designed to look like an Egyptian tomb with 21st-century lighting, visual illusions and sound effects.

Interactive is often an overused term, but "Tomb" truly is. You're on your feet for the entire 40-minute adventure, touching walls, pushing a statue, moving puzzle pieces, and absorbing the intense sensory experience as an angry Pharaoh bellows and threatens to kill you if you don't prove your strength, courage and brain power.

Inside the dark and foggy tomb, you have to work with your group to solve nine challenges as you walk through three rooms led by a guide. What distinguishes the show is that the special effects change depending on what you do inside the tomb.

"It's hands-on entertainment that forces people to get off their rear end," said owner/creator Matthew DuPlessie, an Attleboro native and mechanical engineer who previously designed projects for Disney World.

"It's not a scripted show that will take place whether you're there or not. There's a story that people are playing through and how it goes depends on how well and quickly the group performs."

From start to finish, the challenges become more difficult. And the special effects keep you alert for surprises.

"The show is not bloody and gory, but it is scary because the rooms get quite dark and the sound gets quite loud," DuPlessie said. "If you succeed, there is a great and grand final effect in the end, and if you fail before the finish, there's a near death experience."

It can be surprising who does well.



**Tomb in Boston takes visitors through an Egyptian tomb and has them try to solve challenges in order to escape. (LISA BUL/The Patriot Ledger)**

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"We had 11-year-olds at a birthday party who whipped through it, but we also had middle-aged executives who died," said guide Spike Hirsch. "They were trying to come up with these complicated solutions and didn't want to listen to the hints."

On a recent day, Gregg Pappas brought the employees of his consulting firm for a team-building exercise.

"It was a good experience for us because we all worked together," said Pappas, a partner in the Parthenon Group in Boston. "We finished, but we did need some help."

"Tomb" is the first show at 5W!TS, the show site and production company started by DuPlessie, who has degrees from MIT and Harvard Business School. He chose the name 5W!TS from the Shakespeare play "Much Ado About Nothing," because of its references to memory, imagination, fantasy, common sense and estimation.

DuPlessie selected an Egyptian theme for the first production because of its popularity and association with Indiana Jones. He has striven to make the tomb interior authentic, covering the walls with images and hieroglyphics copied from actual tombs in Egypt.

DuPlessie now is working on a deep sea adventure that will replace "Tomb" in about a year, which he expects to move to a 5W!TS site in Providence.

Pat Austin of Scituate, a 29-year-old carpenter who builds sets for the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, was impressed.

"It's put together very well," said Austin, who visited "Tomb" with two high school friends. "It's very well done."

When the massive doors closed behind Shideler and Rich, they were face to face with the great and powerful Pharaoh, whose image was projected onto a screen of falling water. They had intruded into his tomb, but he might spare them if they met his challenges and returned his hidden body to its sarcophagus. If not, they would die.

"There's no place to run and no place to hide," Pharaoh warned ominously.

Inside the first room, the two easily found the solar discs embedded in the walls and worked a little harder to push back a heavy statue of Pharaoh, high-fiving each other after their success. But they were flustered by the challenge of repeating a melody by hitting touch pads in the correct order. And the jets of air around their feet following the "courage" challenge were anti-climatic after a suspenseful build-up.

Shideler and Rich did much better in the second room, where they had to assemble a pyramid of blocks and arrange large floor puzzle pieces to mimic wall hieroglyphics. But when someone stepped onto a hidden trap door in the floor, the ceiling started to fall and the two had to race against time to keep from being crushed.

"That ceiling was intense," Shideler said.

And then the pressure was on in the third room, where the two were instructed to light up pharaoh's face but given no guidance about how to do so. After a minute or so, the guide hinted to check out the four massive columns in the corners.

"This is hard core," Shideler said as the two figured out that the columns had spinning sections. Ultimately, they activated four lasers, which led them to a maze on the wall.

"It's good we're not actual explorers, because we'd be dead 100 times over," Rich said, as they next tried to figure out the maze.

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When they finally lit up Pharaoh's face, an amazing special effect occurred - which will remain a surprise for future visitors.

Should the two return to "Tomb," they likely will have a different experience since the challenges vary from show to show.

Afterward, Shideler and Rich were sure the experience was fun for friends, and, after a bit of a debate, decided it would make a fun date as well.

"You're pessimistic when you hear about it at first, because you wonder whether you'll walk through a couple of rooms and feel ripped off," Rich said. "But someone said it's better than going to a bar. I think it's innovative. I like that you really feel like you're transported somewhere."

**If you go...**

**"Tomb" at 5W!TS**

**Where:** 186 Brookline Ave., Boston.

**Hours:** 11 a.m.-midnight Mon., Weds., Thurs.; 11 a.m.-1 a.m. Fri., 10 a.m.-1 a.m. Sat., 2 p.m.-midnight Sun. Closed Tues. Shows run continuously every 20 minutes.

**Good stuff:** The lobby has a cafe with coffee and desserts, as well as a gift shop.

**Parking:** Across the street in the Landmark Center garage.

**Tickets:** Admission is \$20; \$16 under age 12 Fri.-Sun.; all other days \$15; \$13 under 12. Entrance before 6 p.m. is discounted \$2-\$4.

**Warning:** Not recommended for children under age 10.

**Info:** 617-375-9487; [www.5-wits.com](http://www.5-wits.com).

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