



**5Wits founder MATT DuPLESSIE** (left) created *Tomb*, an Egyptian-inspired interactive adventure that pits teams of flashlight-wielding "explorers" against the Pharaoh's challenges. An explorer (right) enters *Tomb* where computer-controlled special effects guide visitors in a puzzle-solving adventure.

## The New Pocket-Sized Theme Park Concept

### INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Ever wanted to own your own theme-park attraction—not some Sim video game, but a real, walk-through interactive adventure with tricks, traps and puzzles? Say, something themed around an Egyptian tomb, with collapsing ceilings, shifting floors, waterfalls and fog?

Until now, you had to be a Disney mogul to pull off something so sophisticated. But technology has made it more viable for individuals to play theme-park entrepreneur—both in terms of cost and space. In fact, the fun house described above exists. And it cost less than \$1 million to build and fits in just 6,000 square feet (including gift shop and Starbucks-style café) tucked into a commercial block on the south side of Boston's Fenway Park.

This pocket theme park is called *Tomb*, conceived by 27-year-old Matt DuPlessie, who parlayed an MIT mechanical engineering degree, a Harvard MBA and a stint as a project manager for a Walt Disney contractor to become a real-life dungeon master.

*Tomb*, opened in October 2004, is the first urban adventure for DuPlessie's company, 5Wits. It challenges groups of three to 15 people to enter a painstakingly recreated Egyptian archaeology site, move through tomb chambers solving puzzles and emerge alive (or not). A pharaoh's ghost taunts and challenges the adventurers throughout the journey, which takes about 40 minutes. Uniquely, the pharaoh, with furtive assistance from a live "guide," can make the riddles easier or harder depending on how well the group is doing, truly customizing the experience. In effect, "the show isn't happening to

the visitors, the visitors are happening to the show," says DuPlessie.

The required participation is a big shift in perspective—one that many visitors don't anticipate. At first they mill about, expecting events to unfold, when in fact, they have to act to trigger events. For example, a riddle tells explorers to illuminate the pharaoh's face. It's up to the guests to pick up two polished metal mirrors and figure out how to use them. Their task: to bend a light beam to shine on the appropriate spot in the chamber (where a photo sensor will then trigger one of *Tomb*'s finales). And in this adventure, failure is an option, rewarded by the simulated demise of your entire party.

DuPlessie programmed the whole *Tomb* show by himself in a few months, proving, he says, that the technology is becoming

suitable for "the average Joe." The program that runs all of *Tomb*'s effects and events fits on three compact flash memory cards, the kind that hold photos in digital cameras. The hardware DuPlessie uses sits on a rack in a space no bigger than a walk-in closet.

The downsized theme-show technology is so portable, it allows DuPlessie to take his concept on the road. After a year, *Tomb* will be disassembled, packed and shipped to a new downtown location in another city, and a whole new adventure will fill its Fenway space. DuPlessie says he's considering a James Bond-style adventure or an underwater struggle modeled on Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. He's already noodling ways to submerge guests without actually drowning them.

—Richard Pastore

## MAYBE LAWYERS SHOULD BILL BY THE PROJECT...

Since September 2003, the Recording Industry Association of America has filed 7,700 lawsuits against defendants for alleged file-trading violations on peer-to-peer networks.