

**BRING THE FAMILY**  
LOOKING FOR ADVENTURE WITH THE KIDS

# Game for a life-size puzzle?

**WHO:** Globe staffer Stephanie Ebbert and her children, Anna, 9, and Nick, 6

**WHAT:** Training to be spies

**WHERE:** 5 Wits, Patriot Place, Foxborough

What is 5 Wits, exactly? Not a museum. Not a show. The interactive experience feels like being in a video game. You enter one level and use your skills to advance to the next. In other words, it's incredibly cool, even for adults.

5 Wits, located at Patriot Place right near Gillette Stadium, has two different shows, each about an hour long and led by a tour guide.

The first show, "Espionage," enlists guests as spies to infiltrate the business next door and pursue clues to find a mole in the organization. This requires all manners of puzzle-solving and pattern-matching, disarming listening devices, figuring out codes to open doors, and most excitingly, dodging lasers in a tunnel.

It was in the tunnel that I began to realize that we were not in for a cheesy ride at 5 Wits. Detailed attention has been paid to every element of the design: The lighting, the background music, and the quality of the sets contribute to its realism and its transporting effect. By the time we emerged from a sealed chamber to see that a bomb had reduced our room to a smoking, charred shell, I was duly impressed.

It turns out that the place was built by 5 Wits Productions, a team of set designers, engineers, craftsmen, and project managers that also does exhibits and science centers. Founder Matthew DuPlessie, who previously designed for Disney and Universal Studios, later told me that the trickiest design feature of 5 Wits is its fully automated control system. There's no "Oz behind the curtain," he said. The controls are intelligent enough to make adjustments based on the input from each group: Move through the rooms too quickly and you might run into the group ahead of you; the control system ratchets up the challenges to slow you down.

Despite all that unseen technology, one of the maneuvers that delighted my kids most was crawling through a vent tunnel to let the grown-ups through a locked door. Though 5 Wits looks and feels cutting edge, the adventures are tangible; kids don't don goggles to witness a virtual reality. Instead, they use their own skills and imaginations, adjusting gears, levers, fuses, and switches to create their own. That's enticing to a kid today, who has so much dazzling technology within reach, that as DuPlessie put it, "the only way to beat it is to actually be real."

The effects were magical for both my kids —



PATRIOT PLACE

Anna, who loves to act out a drama, and Nick, who would live in a video game if I let him. On our first visit, the kids were crushed that we only had enough time for one show. I promised we'd return and when we did, with the kids' cousins, we saw "20,000 Leagues," a steampunk-styled underwater adventure with dazzling visual effects and especially smart puzzles. In one activity, the kids had to read navigational clues to locate spots on a map. When they'd succeeded, the spots lit up and turned into musical notes. The music, which cousin Kyle played on an organ, unlocked the door to let us into the next room.

How multimodal is that?

**5 Wits, 202 Patriot Place, Foxborough;**  
tickets: \$18 per adult, \$14 per child or save money with combo tickets for both shows. Shows run every 15 minutes, check for showtimes at [5-wits.com](http://5-wits.com) or 508-698-1600.

Stephanie Ebbert can be reached at [ebbert@globe.com](mailto:ebbert@globe.com). Follow her on Twitter @stephanieebbert.